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# COMMONWEAL

## RELIGIOUS BOOK ISSUE

RUSSELL CONNORS on Bishop Flavin's mistake

DAVID CALLAHAN on the United Nations

JIM CHAPIN on the Campaign

CARLIN ANNOUNCES a choice in Rhode Island

## WHO'S DOING CATHOLIC THEOLOGY?

and why, how & where?

ROBERT J. EGAN

## What I'm reading for Lent

ROBERT IMBELLI • ANDREW GREELEY
CAROL RITTNER • MARY LOU KOWNACKI
REMBERT WEAKLAND • MEINRAD CRAIGHEAD
ART WINTER • ROBERT HOVDA
ROSANNE HAGGERTY REDMOND

NEARER THAN THE DOOR Sally & Joe go to Ireland

JOSEPH CUNNEEN

...S: ROBERT SPAETH on Newman
...D SCOTT on Dorothy Day's feminism
...HUR MOORE on Wesley & Whitefield
...K PATRICK HEDERMAN on James Joyce

and as usual... LAWRENCE CUNNINGHAM

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# CORRESPONDENCE

## A feminist, but...

Drexel Hill, Pa.

*To the Editors:* I could easily identify with David Carlin's recent column ["I'm Not a Feminist, But..." January 17]. I know plenty of women who feel this way.

However, I am not one of them. For me it's the other way round. I *am* a feminist, *but*. For example, *but* I'm against abortion; *but* I don't hate men; *but* I still believe in God. Et cetera. And I know plenty of women who feel *this* way, too.

WINI WOLFF

## Carlin too casual

Chicago, Ill.

*To the Editors:* May I address only one of the misstatements in David Carlin's recent column on feminism. Mr. Carlin makes an airy admission that men may and sometimes do "leave women high and dry while moving on to fresh woods and new pastures," whatever that means. Leaving women "high and dry" has a light, comfortable, boys-will-be-boys sound to it. In truth, too often men leave their wives and children not "high and dry," but low in funds and wet with tears: poor, abandoned, and helpless. Worse, the boys may hang around to batter and abuse their families.

The feminists I know—social workers, lawyers, psychologists, volunteers at shelters—are more likely to see persons one at a time than systems or institutions as such. Their emphasis is on relationships that respect the needs and rights of individuals, many of whom are oppressed by institutions. These women have goals with which all men and women not misinformed by careless writers are likely to agree.

KATHARINE BYRNE

**Correction:** We regret that in the February 14 issue, the poet Bruce Ducker's name was misspelled when accompanying his poem, "The Frying Pan in Winter." Fortunately, the correct spelling of his name did appear with his "Fragment," a poem which appeared in the February 28 issue. Thus we avoided jumping totally into the fire. Our apologies to Mr. Ducker.

THE EDITORS

## It's a satire, right?

Hopkins, S.C.

*To the Editors:* Thank you for publishing David Carlin's column on feminism. It demonstrates the penetrating power of satire to illuminate a complex issue. Only a muse-blest social scientist, ultra-wry humorist, and intrepid writer would risk compressing so many stereotypic caricatures, scapegoating techniques, and blame-the-victim accusations in a brief, double-edged piece.

Mr. Carlin's pretense of delivering straight-faced prose while displaying egregious hubris and knuckle-headed insensitivity to legitimate feminist concerns assists the reader in understanding the dilemmas that feminists face. For example, he subtly yet forcefully clarifies how feminists are maligned for objecting to discriminating norms when their interests are ignored and their contributions are limited by institutions and individuals who insist that their own pseudo-norms be accepted as universal standards. Mr. Carlin's revealing use of irony cuts through the ploys of those who deplore inclusivity and who would prevent the loss of closely held controls.

Juxtaposing feminism and secular religion almost blew the writer's cover. He was at the edge of effectively searing feminists, but he redeemed his role as sardonic jester when, after classifying communism and nazism as "other" ersatz religions, he pulled back to admit that feminism is not in the same league with "either of those" ideologies. In qualifying that comparison his satirical wit exposes the obvious, thereby revealing as transparent nonsense similar arguments put forth in all seriousness by sloppy writers trying to pass their work off as valid analyses of feminism.

Yet, a caveat is in order. We know that oft-repeated lies, particularly if they are politically and parochially sanctioned, do deceive the gullible. Despite the sophistication of *Commonweal*'s clientele, are we not concerned that an innocent or brainwashed reader might take his effort as a straightforward critique of feminism? That would do disservice to the standing of your publication and, of course, to Mr. Carlin's reputation as a worthy commentator.

JOAN M. ALTERKRUSE, M.D.

## The author replies:

Three brief responses. (1) Wini Wolff is correct: feminists of her type are not uncommon. Unfortunately, they count for little or nothing in the leadership of the feminist movement. (2) I agree with Katharine Byrne's observations, and I cannot understand why she imagines I would disagree. She must have me mixed up with someone else. (3) I have read Dr. Alterkruse's letter at least half a dozen times, and I still can't figure it out. But that's my failing. The South Carolina satirical style has always eluded me.

DAVID R. CARLIN

*(Continued on page 44)*

*Commonweal*, is indexed in Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, Catholic Periodical Index, Index of American Periodical Verse, Book Review Digest and Book Review Index. Microfilm from Vol. 1, 1924, to current issues available through University Microfilm, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106 and on Microfiche from Bell & Howell, Wooster, Ohio 44691. Serials Data program No.: ISSN 0010-3330. Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y. and at additional offices. Copyright © 1992 Commonweal Foundation. Single Copy, $2. Yearly subscriptions, U.S., $36; Canada, $39; foreign, $41. Special two-year rate: U.S., $62; Canada, $66; foreign, $72. All Canadian and foreign subscriptions must be paid in U.S. dollars by International Money Order or by check on a U.S. bank.

*Illustrations:*
Cover Art & Cover Design, Emil Antonucci; Cover Pictures by Jean Charlot; pp. 5, 9, 11, 20, 23, Ross, Rothco; pp. 12, 46, Baloo, Rothco; pp. 15, 16, 18, 40, Jean Charlot; p. 20, Donegan, Punch, Rothco; p. 26, Haldene, Punch, Rothco; p. 34, Sketch of Dorothy Day by Fritz Eichenburg.



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COMMONWEAL

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## STAFF


Editor: Margaret O'Brien Steinfels
Managing Editor: Patrick Jordan
Associate Editor: Paul Baumann
Production Editor: Jacqueline Dowdell
Senior Writer: Robert G. Hoyt
Publisher: Edward S. Skillin


*Commonweal*, [ISSN 0010-3330] A Review of Public Affairs, Religion, Literature, and the Arts, is published biweekly, except monthly Christmas, New Year's and July and August, by Commonweal Foundation, 15 Dutch St., New York, N.Y. 10038. Telephone: (212) 732-0800. Display advertising correspondence should be sent to Ruth E. Taylor, 11 Graffam Rd., So. Portland, Me. 04106 (207) 799-4387, classified advertising correspondence to 15 Dutch St. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Commonweal, 15 Dutch St. New York, N.Y. 10038.

# 'Roe' redux

Even though defeated at the last moment by its highest court, the Irish government's attempt to bar a fourteen-year-old girl from traveling to England for an abortion serves to reinforce the deepest suspicions of the prochoice movement about the ultimate goals of those working to restrict the right to abortion. The girl's circumstances (she is pregnant as the result of rape) fall into the hard-cases-make-bad-law category. Irish law forbids all abortions except to save the life of the mother; for the government to enforce that ban by also restricting the right to travel raises in stark form the question of how far those morally opposed to abortion will go in using civil law to compel compliance with their moral views. Prolife forces in Ireland are willing to go very far indeed.

Whether women made pregnant through rape or incest must be *morally* bound to reject abortion may be debated among ethicists and theologians; using the apparatus of state power to make one such victim a virtual prisoner of her country, thereby compelling her to complete a pregnancy imposed on her by violence, would have been an abuse of power. The very attempt was a foolish mistake—even in Ireland, where there is a prolife consensus that was expressed in a national referendum.

By overreaching, then, Ireland's attorney general has handed the prochoice movement a potent weapon, one that has been blunted but not sheathed by the High Court's decision. The weapon will be put to immediate use in this country, even though in the United States the question is not whether there are any grounds for *permitting* abortion but whether there are any for *restricting* it.

In our culture, with its short memory, it is no surprise to hear cries of dismay when the "time-honored" and "fundamental" right to abortion is threatened. Among proabortion leaders, the decision of the Supreme Court to consider the constitutionality of a Pennsylvania statute requiring spousal notification, parental consent for minors, informed consent procedures, and a twenty-four-hour waiting period has raised that threat. These leaders therefore are hoping for a decision that will overthrow the *Roe* v. *Wade* decision altogether, rather than whittling it away by merely affirming the Pennsylvania statute. Overthrowing *Roe*, they believe, would set the stage for enactment of a national law—the Freedom of Choice Act—that would replace *Roe*, be less vulnerable to Court interpretation, and avoid the patchwork of abortion law that would arise from individual states enacting their own abortion laws. In this presidential campaign year, when all the Democratic candidates, like lemmings, have already signed on to the idea of federal abortion legislation, the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) and other pro-abortion groups think this strategy has a chance.

The precipitous panic of prochoicers is unnecessary; the anticipatory celebration of prolifers is unwarranted. The Court may well uphold the Pennsylvania law, but



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it need not and probably will not overturn *Roe*. In the service of that view, it is helpful to return again to the decision itself and to 1973.

First, there never was a fundamental or absolute right to abortion. So wrote Justice Harry Blackmun for the majority: "...Appellants and some *amici* argue that the woman's right is absolute and that she is entitled to terminate her pregnancy at whatever time, in whatever way, and for whatever reason she alone chooses. With this we do not agree....A state may properly assert important interests in safeguarding health, in maintaining medical standards, and in protecting potential life. At some point in pregnancy, these respective interests become sufficiently compelling to sustain regulation of the factors that govern the abortion decision. The privacy right involved, therefore, cannot be said to be absolute...."

Second, through much of the 1970s state legislatures tested what those "important state interests" might be through measures requiring parental notification and consent, spousal notification and consent, informed consent procedures, waiting periods, and safety provisions. Several states, including Ohio, Missouri, and Massachusetts, passed legislation similar to various provisions of the Pennsylvania law. The Burger Court consistently ruled these unconstitutional. Now the Rehnquist Court under full steam may return to the original decision and the road not taken in the '70s.

If it upholds the Pennsylvania limits and restrictions, the Court could legitimately argue that it is making a reasonable and honest alternative reading of the original decision. Of course, the Court, now conservative, activist, and apparently harboring no inclination to judicial restraint, may simply overthrow the decision and return to the states the prerogative of shaping their own laws on the matter.

In either case, state legislatures and voters finally would be given the chance to enact their views—or at least some of them—into state law. Some would be highly restrictive, while others would not; perhaps some would even follow the general outlines of *Roe*. Were the Congress to short-circuit this process by passing the Freedom of Choice Act, it would certainly not end the debate over abortion. It would make its own legislative process—and congressional elections—the focus of single-issue politics from both sides. Of course, this will happen in the states too, but in the legislatures of fifty states there can be a resolution of the abortion issue that would, at least very roughly, honor the diversity and ambivalence—moral, regional, and political—that the American people express on abortion.

Groups like NARAL and Operation Rescue will not be satisfied with halfway measures. Others active in the debate, both prolife and prochoice, may be more ready to rely on half measures in the legal arena. The very best of them may do so in order to turn their full attention to the potential of moral and social persuasion. Law of itself will not persuade women and men in individual situations that they should honor fetal life. Yet the law is a teacher; some legal restrictions on abortion will "teach" us that there is value to fetal life. But the number of abortions will decline significantly only when moral sensitivities and cultural proclivities make people stop and think.

As we move into a post-*Roe* world, acrimonious debate, media bias, and violence in the name of civil disobedience will continue to mark the abortion question. That should not deter those able to see beyond the law to the social and economic deprivations that drive some women toward the abortion solution, and the moral and cultural forces that serve to justify that choice. For finally it is attention to those realms that will help reduce the number of abortions.

**AN EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK**

## WHY THEY DIED
### ACCOUNTABILITY AT CITY COLLEGE

On December 28, nine young people, African-Americans, died at the bottom of a stairwell leading to a basement gym at the City College of New York. According to the coroner they were asphyxiated, their chests crushed as they were pressed against the gym doors or lay under the weight of the people piled on top of them. The indifference of those crowded around them and the obliviousness of the police stationed outside remind me of Auden's "About suffering they were never wrong, /the Old Masters; ... How it takes place / While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along...." The physical revulsion I felt as I read about the suffocation of those young men and women certainly rose from the fact that one of my children goes to City College, although he was not there that evening.

As it turned out, the deaths were more than a simple accident, more than the result of a crowd's momentary heedlessness pressing to get into a celebrity basketball game. The nine deaths turn out to have been a tragedy-waiting-to-happen. The tangled explanations tell a story of irresponsibility and lack of accountability overlaid with the convoluted politics of race.

In the current cultural climate, responsibility and accountability seem to be public virtues called forth only by lawsuits or media exposés. And where the public good is at stake, we are generally in a fog as to how it should be asserted. On top of these, it is painful and difficult to raise issues of responsibility and accountabilty with blacks who still have so much due them on the ledger book of American history. So, living in a society where we are all free to act as we wish and where we are willing to allow others to do so too, we seem to count on some invisible hand to enforce the equivalent of Justice Holmes's dictum: An individual's freedom of speech does not extend to yelling, "Fire!" in a crowded theater. In the case at hand, an individual's freedom of action does not extend to pushing people down the stairs. But the invisible hand did not reach out in a benevolent gesture on that Saturday evening.

In the efforts of city and college officials to unscramble what happened at the gym in Mahoney Hall, this much, at least, has



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become clear: In a public building, operated by a public authority (City University of New York), innumerable and egregious lapses in the enforcement of university regulations were routine. They were the administration's way of both managing and avoiding social conflict.

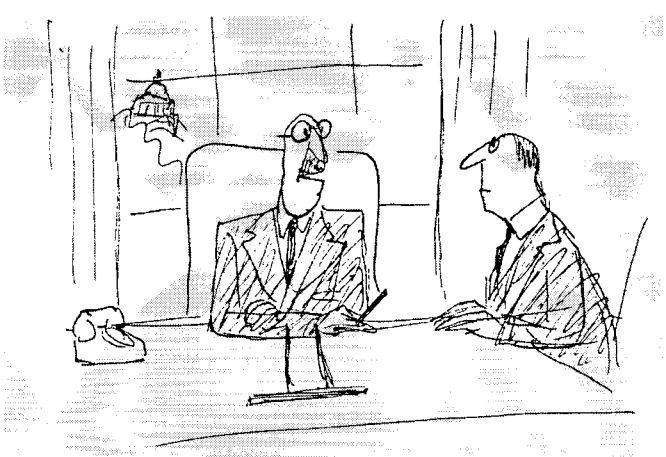
The nine young people who died were part of a crowd waiting to get in to watch rap stars play basketball. The game was organized by the Evening Student Government and a rap promoter (neither of whom accurately represented the event to school officials; nor did either have the required liability insurance). The student activities coordinator, the official immediately in charge, did not insist that the form for renting the gym be filled out properly, nor did he ask any questions about the event, about security preparations, or about insurance. Five thousand people showed up; the gym had a capacity for 2,700. Sixty-six police officers were stationed outside the building to control the waiting crowd. By agreement with the university, New York city policeman do not enter college buildings.

As it became clear that not everyone would be admitted to the gym, some rushed the building, pressing forward against those waiting in the lobby and the stairwell. Thus the crush at the bottom of the stairs, thus the nine deaths.

The subsequent investigation showed that overcrowding at social events was common; that there had been a stabbing and death at a dance earlier in the year; that even though the City University system budgets million of dollars a year for security, on December 28 no guards were posted in the lobby or stairwell of the gym.

Who was responsible? Those who pushed? The police? The rap concert promoter? The student affairs coordinator? Criminal charges against anyone are unlikely, so in our society that means no one will be found responsible. But some have been held accountable. The student affairs coordinator and the head of security were removed; the vice-president for student affairs took early retirement. In his report, the police commissioner said the police followed the rules—but transferred the captain in charge.

This "accident" could have happened anywhere. Yet it is hard to turn back the nagging suspicion that the politics of race shaped and channeled choices, decisions, and behavior, even though most of those directly involved were black: the students who died, the crowd, the organizers, the school officials, and the president of City College, as well as those holding fiduciary responsibility—the police commissioner and the mayor. (The police captain, and at least some of the policemen, are white.)



*"Refresh my memory. Just what was my oath of office all about?"*

Something like the backdraft in a fire, those attempts made over the years to ease the social conflicts that rise from the efforts to compensate for our racist history now blow back on those at work trying to bring the fire under control. Bernard Harleston, the president of City College for ten years, has tried to do two things in his tenure; first, make City College a place where minority students, along with everyone else, can learn and can earn a degree; and second, insure that the campus is a place that neither affronts nor confronts the black community, neither the Harlem community that surrounds it, nor the larger New York black intellectual and political community.

This latter policy has meant an openness to the community and a hands-off policy toward student activities. Last spring, Harleston persuaded the university chancellor that a student strike against a tuition increase should be allowed to run its course. Violence was avoided. This past fall, he persuaded university trustees to allow Leonard Jeffries to continue, at least temporarily, as head of the Black Studies Department despite anti-Jewish and anti-Italian remarks in a speech. Confrontation was avoided. Until the nine deaths, Harleston's policy seems to have succeeded. But that policy, translated down the administrative ladder, clearly led school officials to ignore rules, to suspend judgment, and at times, to take leave of their common sense. And the students followed their lead. Even the police captain on duty outside the gym was probably observing some version of this policy: Don't start trouble with these kids. Don't assert police authority unless absolutely necessary. Don't make your men the angry focus of those not getting into the gym. Were the police captain and the college president wrong?

There is likely to be a renewed enforcement of the rules at City College. There may be a change in the college's president. But if Harleston, who seems a decent and competent man, can't manage both to avoid confrontation and to set limits, who can? If the police captain can't prevent violence and enforce the law, who can? The awful truth is that no one, black or white, will "mess" with young blacks, especially young black males. Adult fear and confusion about rules and responsibility have taken their toll at City College and elsewhere.

Two weeks ago, Mayor David Dinkins went to Thomas Jefferson high school where two students had just been shot and killed by another. All were black. He said to a shocked and grieving student assembly, "You must learn from this. So please help me. Help your principal. Help yourselves." His words were moving. But until now, the mayor, like President Harleston of City College, has managed social conflict by avoiding confrontation and sidestepped his duty to hold city officials accountable. Until now, he has not preached an ethic of personal responsibility. How many more young blacks will die before someone figures out how to do it differently? Will anyone ever figure out how to do it differently? As Auden says of the old master Brughel's *Icarus*, "how everything turns away/ Quite leisurely from the



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disaster;.../ the expensive delicate ship that must have seen/ Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky./ Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on."

MARGARET O'BRIEN STEINFELS

CAMPAIGN '92

## BUSH FALTERING
## IS TSONGAS A REPUBLICAN?

Since it began in 1952, the New Hampshire primary has taken on mythic power in American politics. One of its "rules" is that if the vote for the leading anti-incumbent exceeds 30 percent, the incumbent's cause is lost. Another is that every presidential winner has won his party's New Hampshire primary. If both these rules hold in 1992, Paul Tsongas is our next president. No one, however, has yet drawn this "logical" conclusion.

So far, Tsongas has managed to persuade the media that he is campaigning on the "hard truths" avoided by other Democratic candidates; in so doing, he'd have us believe, he is fighting the antibusiness position of the Democratic party. But over the last twenty years, when has this been true? Under Jimmy Carter, the most economically conservative Democratic president since Grover Cleveland? In the Democratic-dominated Congresses that passed the Reagan budgets? During Walter Mondale's campaign—a man whose only campaign promise was to raise taxes? In Michael Dukakis, who touted the "Massachusetts Miracle" and found "populism" only in the last, desperate two weeks of his campaign?

In fact, the Tsongas platform, which combines economic conservatism and social liberalism, has dominated the Democratic party since the midseventies. This combination may also help explain the media's generally favorable treatment of him. In everything from free trade to unregulated capitalism to abortion and environmentalism, he shares their views. Indeed, on the TV talk shows, without the sharp tongue of Pat Buchanan, it is hard to find anyone with an unkind word for Tsongas.

Also it is no surprise to find that Tsongas, like so many other neoliberals, comes from a Republican family. In fact, he is just the latest example of those transplanted liberal Republicans in the Democratic party, those "pragmatists" who always seem to end up by losing.

A Tsongas presidency might well be a disastrous reincarnation of the Carter presidency—continuing to alienate the party from its critically important constituencies among the socially conservative and economically liberal; for example, the Catholic vote.

Among the "probusiness" questions that should be put to Tsongas, but probably won't be, is one about whom he would appoint to the National Labor Relations Board. On the other hand, his status as a paid lobbyist for the National Venture Capital Association, and other unexamined parts of his biography, will soon be scrutinized.

Republican consultant Roger Ailes and NBC commentator John Chancellor agree that Tsongas ran the most economically right-wing campaign in New Hampshire. No surprise then that his primary win correlated closely with economic status and education; he took half the postgraduate vote. Clinton voters were relatively even across the socioeconomic spectrum, while the other Democrats candidates had an economic profile the opposite of Tsongas's.

Media coverage of presidential election races manages to get worse every four years; 1992 continues this downward path. In 1972, Ed Muskie's 47 percent was discounted because he was a "neighboring-state senator." In 1988, Dukakis's 36 percent showing as "neighboring-state governor" was enough to make him the putative winner. Now with just 34 percent of the vote Tsongas got a big bounce. The media—though they first crowned Bill Clinton front runner, and then unthroned him without a vote being cast—now seem to have decided that the Clinton showing in New Hampshire is enough to keep him alive in the race. His survival in the face of this media windstorm seems to make Clinton the likely Democratic nominee. And the boos that rained down on PBS comic Mark Russell at his University of Buffalo forum when he joked about Clinton's motel parking spaces suggest that the governor is benefiting from a backlash against media exposés. Nonetheless, party pros fear that he has suffered permanent damage. I agree with them.

Senator Bob Kerrey ran aground for lack of a theme in New Hampshire. He spent the most on TV ads, but ran at least twenty different ones. Health care was the only issue on which he seemed well informed. To the Democratic core electorate, his being a Vietnam veteran was probably more puzzling than heartening. Senator Tom Harkin seemed to love every Democrat he didn't know, and attacked every one he did. If he was running a "help people" campaign, this technique didn't help. Though Jerry Brown did better than expected, he still finished fifth. His message may sell better than he does. And, at last, even the New York media have apparently realized that their fascination with Governor Mario Cuomo is not shared by the rest of the country.

New Hampshire gave George Bush his second highest percentage in the 1988 general election. In 1992, Bush spent more time and effort in New Hampshire than any incumbent president. But this year only one issue was playing: the economy. The attitude of voters toward any other issue was, as Jeff Greenfield put it, a bit like the old joke: "Aside from *that,* Mrs. Lincoln, how was the play?"

It wasn't just that the incumbent president got only 53 percent of his party's vote. The exit polls showed that 47 percent of New Hampshire Republicans disapprove of his presidency and that half the Buchanan voters expect to vote against Bush in the fall. In fact, no less than 7 percent of the Republican voters were write-in, and most of them wrote in the names of Democratic candidates.

There were two factions that weren't on the ballot at all: left-wing Democrats and neoconservatives. One argument used against a Jesse Jackson candidacy (usually by people who didn't



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like him in the first place) was that by soaking up liberal and black voters, he was locking blacks out of the electoral process. In fact, without him in the campaign, black issues are less visible than in any election since 1956. Neoliberals may be happy with this absence, but so far it gives an abstract quality to the campaign.

Neoconservatives are the other losers. Pat Buchanan's ideal Right (sometimes called "the paleoconservatives") is the Right evoked by his slogan "America First." He has taken a long step toward bringing the Right back from its 1980 coalition with Jewish neoconservatives and libertarians to its 1940 coalition with isolationists and nativists. The neoconservative problem—the lack of an electoral constituency—is perhaps sharper than ever.

Bush is left with just two chances of getting reelected: a substantial economic revival in place by the fall, or a Democratic candidate who is not credible as a national alternative. If the economy does not recover, the voters will behave in the fall as they did during the first Carter-Reagan debate in 1980, which Carter won in some abstract sense. The problem for Carter was that the voters were no longer interested in him, they were looking to see if Reagan really was "crazy." Once they found that Reagan seemed acceptable, the election was over. If the economy doesn't pick up, that same question is the only thing standing between Bush and forced retirement.

As a Republican pollster told me, the problem isn't that there aren't conservative solutions to the agenda of most Americans, it's that Bush isn't interested in their agenda. The nation now faces the bad fortune of having been left with an excellent manager of things-as-they-are in charge of a situation in which nothing is at it was. Bush might have done better than Reagan as president from '85 to '89, but few Americans now think that he is the man to lead us into a "new world order." JIM CHAPIN

*Jim Chapin is a writer, political consultant, and a long-time Democratic party activist.*

CONTRACEPTION & COMMUNION

# THE CHURCH'S TEACHING

## BISHOP FLAVIN HAS IT WRONG

Bishop Glennon Flavin of Lincoln, Nebraska, has written a pastoral letter to Catholic couples of his diocese warning those who use artificial contraception that this involves them in a sinful practice and that they "may not receive Holy Communion without committing sacrilege." He gave the same warning to physicians who make birth control available to such couples (*Origins*, November 7, 1991).

As a teacher of Catholic moral theology, I have been mandated, among other things, to explore and explain our theological tradition. Teaching on the matter of artificial contraception, whether supportive or critical, should be based on a clear understanding of what the official teaching actually is. In my judgment, Bishop Flavin's letter has misrepresented—in truth, distorted—Catholic teaching on this issue. In an effort to clarify some theological and pastoral issues the letter either misrepresents or ignores, I would like to offer the following reflections.

First, contrary to Bishop Flavin's approach, Catholic teachings, particularly moral teachings, do not all derive from the same source, nor do they claim the same degree of authority.

The bishop's argument is as follows: Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, came to redeem us and to reveal how we should live; Jesus founded the church, headed by Peter; the church continues to make God's revelation known to us; when the pope teaches in matters of faith and morals, the church teaches, and thereby Christ teaches; the church—through the pope—teaches that artificial contraception is intrinsically evil; therefore, it is the revelation of God that contraception is wrong. In the bishop's words, "Artificial contraception is wrong, not because the church says it is wrong (it was wrong before Christ established the church); it is wrong because God himself, through the revelation of his son, our Lord Jesus Christ, has declared it to be wrong."

Whatever one wishes to make of this line of thought, it must be said that is does not represent traditional Catholic teaching. This theology of revelation eliminates any distinctions regarding degrees of authority in Catholic teachings, excludes even the possibility of legitimate theological dissent, and suggests that the statements "Jesus is the Son of God," and "the use of artificial means of birth regulation is intrinsically dishonest" are both based on God's revelation, claim the same degree of authority, and are equally central to Catholic faith. Such is not the case.

It is particularly in regard to questions of morality that Bishop Flavin's argument misses the mark. For example, in regard to birth regulation, Paul VI insisted that the objective immorality of contraception is based first and foremost on the natural law, its reasonableness thereby being accessible to all. That is why *Humanae vitae* is addressed to all people of good will, in the hope that they would be "capable of seizing the deeply reasonable and human character of this fundamental principle" (par. 12).

Paul VI's effort in the encyclical expresses two long-standing Catholic convictions: first, although God may be said to be the author of nature, it is often not obvious what the detailed applications of the natural law should be; second, such concrete applications, which need to be demonstrated, do not claim the same degree of certainty as general principles like "do good and avoid evil" (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, Q. 94, A. 4). Thus, Paul VI knew that in articulating a natural-law norm about contraception he needed to show that it was "deeply reasonable." Further, he knew that to claim ultimate certainty or authority (by invoking infallibility) would be out of keeping with the concrete and complex nature of the issue at hand.

Instead of his convoluted appeal to authority, Bishop Flavin might have been more effective had he addressed the reason for the norm itself and thereby helped couples and physicians to grasp the "deeply reasonable" character of the teaching.

Second, the pastoral letter says that the use of contraceptives is a "sinful practice" and reception of Communion without prior



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reception of the sacrament of penance is sacrilegious. Likewise the cooperation of physicians is gravely sinful and an impediment to participation in the Eucharist. This misrepresents Catholic tradition and entails a deviation from current Catholic moral teaching.

In *Humanae vitae*, Paul VI made a judgment about what is and is not in keeping with the "objective moral order" (par. 10). Because contraception separates the procreative from the unitive meaning of sexual intercourse, he argued, it violates the "intimate structure" of the act (par. 12), and is therefore "intrinsically dishonest" (par. 14). The pope set forth this teaching in the hope that couples might see its reasonableness and be able to have their minds, wills, and lives informed accordingly.

Paul's only reference to sin was the oft-attended-to conditional clause: "And if sin should still keep its hold over them, let them not be discouraged, but rather have recourse with humble perseverance to the mercy of God, which is poured forth in the sacrament of penance" (par. 25). In the pope's thought is it possible that the use of contraception may be sinful? Yes. Did Paul assert its sinfulness unequivocally in all cases? No.

Those familiar with Catholic moral tradition know why Paul VI did not—could not—declare contraception unambiguously sinful. The traditional manuals of moral theology, for example, insisted that not only the moral object of the act, but the motive and circumstances must be considered in determining the moral nature of a concrete human act (Noldin, *Theologiae moralis*, V. I, p. 76). On the popular level, even the Baltimore catechism taught that in order for something to be sinful the act itself must be wrong, but there must also be sufficient knowledge and freedom in the performance of the act; when those elements are diminished or removed, so too is one's personal culpability or sinfulness. Finally, magisterial documents subsequent to *Humanae vitae* invoke those important distinctions. Thus the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's "Declaration on Sexual Ethics" (1975) describes the difference between an action being objectively wrong or intrinsically disordered and a person's subjective degree of culpability (pars. 8-10). The U.S. Catholic bishops' pastoral letter immediately following *Humanae vitae*, "Human Life in Our Day," made the same point (pars. 41 & 45). Discussions continue regarding the adequacy of this objective/subjective distinction; many think it needs revision or expansion. Currently, however, it is part of the church's moral and pastoral tradition. Bishop Flavin's letter disregards it—inappropriately.

To be fair, the bishop does use the terms, "immoral," "intrinsically evil," and "wrong" quite often in describing contraception; those are categories more in keeping with *Humanae vitae* itself. However, when he states that those using contraceptives commit a sacrilege when they receive Communion, when he urges them to discontinue the "sinful practice" that is contraception, and when he calls physicians' cooperation "gravely sinful," he is making judgments about the consciences and hearts of Catholic people that are unwarranted and unjust. His teaching is not consistent with *Humanae vitae*, and deviates from long-standing Catholic moral and pastoral tradition.

I acknowledge that some could argue that Bishop Flavin's categorization of contraception (and physicians' cooperation) as sinful could be taken to mean "material sin," rather than "formal sin." This distinction, found in the traditional manuals of moral theology (Noldin, *Theologiae moralis*, V. I, p. 290) as well as some catechisms, allows for the possibility that a person may do something that is "only materially sinful" in that it is wrong, but done without knowledge or freedom and thereby not "formally sinful," i.e., wrong *and* culpable because done with knowledge and freedom. This language does not appear in contemporary Catholic moral teachings. In my view, the use of the word "sin" in these two very different senses is confusing and has not served pastoral life well. Nevertheless, if Bishop Flavin intended to use the word "sin" in the sense of "material sin," it would have helped immensely if he had acknowledged that use of the term and explained its meaning. Though I acknowledge this interpretation as a possibility, it seems a highly implausible one in that the bishop describes as sacrilegious those who use contraception or cooperate in making it available and still receive Communion. That conclusion entails a judgment about personal culpability, that is, formal sin, and not simply material sin.

My third reflection concerns a matter about which the letter is silent: conscience. If the bishop were trying to shed light on the relationship between the teaching in *Humanae vitae* and the lives of Catholic people (an effort I would applaud) he would have done well to discuss the role of conscience.

In recent pastoral letters, the U.S. Catholic bishops have acknowledged that Catholic moral teaching has two purposes: to help Catholics form their consciences, and to contribute to public discourse on moral issues that affect the human community. Not every pastoral letter of the bishops' conference or of individual bishops needs to do both equally. Bishop Flavin's letter could have served the first of those purposes had he elaborated at least briefly on the relationship of Catholic moral teachings to conscience. His silence about the important role of conscience formation and decision making on moral questions suggests that the Catholic moral life is simply a matter of obedience to norms and rules. It is far more than this.

In fact, Catholic moral teaching is meant to serve the process of conscience formation, not replace it. In the words of Vatican II's *Decree on Religious Liberty*, the Catholic faithful are to "diligently attend to" the teachings of the church (par. 14). They do so in order to have their hearts moved by gospel values and their minds informed by the Spirit-filled teachings of the pastors of the church so that they can make reasonable and loving moral judgments and decisions. This is what conscience formation is about.

If these are the responsibilities of "the faithful," the responsibilities of bishops, as pastoral teachers, are just as serious. Regarding specific questions of morality, the "deeply reasonable" character of the church's moral teachings should be made manifest, along with clear and honest acknowledgment of the sources of that teaching. Put simply, pastoral letters on topics like contraception do well to be marked by a blend of clarity and compassion. In regard to these qualities, Bishop Flavin's letter misses the mark. Theological and pastoral discourse about Catholic



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teaching on contraception, already troubling for many, demands all the clarity and compassion that marks the best of the Catholic tradition.

RUSSELL B. CONNORS, JR.

*Rev. Russell B. Connors, a priest of the Diocese of Cleveland, teaches moral theology at St. Mary Seminary, Wickliffe, Ohio. He has a doctoral degree in moral theology from the Pontifical Lateran University-Academia Alfonsiana.*

REPORT ON THE UNITED NATIONS

# BUSH'S AMBIVALENCE

## SOVEREIGNTY OR COOPERATION?

Not long ago, the United Nations served as Exhibit A for Republican presidents anxious to discredit "idealistic" approaches to world affairs. Richard Nixon considered the UN a marginal entity—so unimportant that in 1970 he appointed a former Texas congressman with no foreign policy experience, George Bush, as UN ambassador. Ronald Reagan waged outright war on the institution, cutting Washington's UN contribution and often flouting international law. In 1987, candidate Bush called the UN "another light that failed." Two years later, as president, he ignored its procedures by unilaterally invading Panama. During the Persian Gulf crisis, Bush did experience a sudden conversion regarding the United Nations, but the perception lingered afterwards that this shift was purely tactical. Observers were quick to note the carrots and sticks that the administration had used to line up anti-Iraq votes in the Security Council. And Bush himself later acknowledged that he might have moved against Iraq even if the UN had not backed such action.

What, then, is one to make of the president's performance at the UN summit held in New York during the last days of January? Like a lapsed worshipper rediscovering a holy text, Bush hailed the "sacred principles enshrined in the UN Charter." More concretely, the president embraced an initiative that instructs the UN secretary general, Dr. Boutro Ghali, to find new ways to put those principles into practice. Ghali is to present his conclusions by July.

For hardened skeptics of the UN—and their numbers are still legion—the summit in New York can be easily summarized: a group of world leaders made predictable speeches in a forum that has long prompted prolixity and false promises. They then commissioned a study which will no doubt be ignored once completed. Indeed, even as Security Council members proclaimed a new world order in New York, evidence of old world disorder was in no short supply: China, it was revealed on January 31, was selling deadly advanced missile technology to Syria and Pakistan; a UN peace plan was dealt a major setback in Yugoslavia; new violence flared in Algeria; and in Haiti, leaders of a military coup against a democratic government continued their defiance of international sanctions.

To be sure, one could list a dozen reasons why the UN summit will amount to nothing. It is easy, as well, to identify the short-term political motives of the supposedly high-minded leaders who gathered in New York. Yet all of these doubts notwithstanding, there is a real significance in recent developments regarding U.S. policy toward the United Nations. Whether deliberately or not, the Bush administration has helped generate a tremendous momentum in favor of cooperation and international law. In time, these newly revived principles could profoundly alter world politics, with the result that U.S. foreign policy could be constrained in a manner not at all to the liking of conservative internationalists.

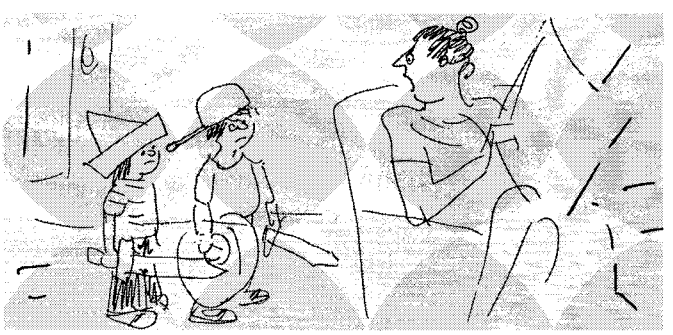
During the Gulf crisis and war, the Bush administration had the best of both worlds. It operated with UN support yet called all the shots. Such a convergence may prove rare in the future, and Washington is sure to find, as it often has, that the international community does not endorse some U.S. foreign policy goals. It is thus not hard to see where the current road leads. The traditional U.S. impulse toward unilateral action—displayed in the invasions of Grenada and Panama and the 1986 air strike on Libya—is almost certain to clash, at some now unforeseen time and place, with the principles of the UN Charter.

One need only reread the charter to appreciate the foreign policy train wreck which lies ahead. It is a truly radical document. On paper, the United Nations has a sweeping mandate to serve as a powerful arbiter of world affairs. The Security Council lies at the center of this vision, charged with "primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security." Under Article 43, it has the power to organize and deploy armed forces drawn from member states.

In a world order governed by the charter, no single nation would have to keep the peace alone, or practically alone as the United States did in the Gulf. More important, if a UN army stood ready to defend any nation against aggression, then all nations would be able to devote fewer resources to national defense. Indeed, this was the vision of the UN Charter when it called for maintaining global peace "with the least diversion for armaments of the world's human and economic resources."

It should go without saying that unilateral military operations stand at odds with a charter which stresses "the pacific settlement of disputes" and spells out elaborate procedures for collective action.

Is the Bush administration really prepared to live by the stric-



*"Must you play 'war'? Can't you play 'detente' and 'diplomacy'?"*



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tures of the UN Charter? One cannot but be skeptical. Listening to Bush's promises to the UN is a bit like watching an inveterate adulterer take yet another wedding vow. Since assuming office, the president's foreign policy vision has been shaped by a desire to retain global primacy and the freedom of action which comes from such a position. Despite Bush's declaration of a "new world order" during the Gulf crisis, there is little to suggest a real change of thinking. "America must lead and our people must understand that," Secretary of State James Baker told Congress in September 1990. A few months later, with the bombing of Iraq underway, Bush echoed this theme. "Among the nations of the world, only the United States of America has both the moral standing and the means to back it up," the president told Congress. "We are the only nation on this earth that could assemble the forces of peace."

Pentagon plans for the 1990s reflect the belief that America is "bound to lead." The collapse of Soviet power notwithstanding, these plans call for reducing U.S. military forces by only 25 percent by 1995. The rationale for such small cuts is that sustained U.S. power is indispensable for keeping order in a world with a high potential for chaos. "Our national strategy is founded on the premise that America will continue to provide the leadership needed to preserve global peace and security," Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Colin Powell told Congress in early 1991. Joseph Nye, Jr., a Harvard political strategist, expressed the deeper logic underpinning this view: "If the strongest state does not lead, the prospects of instability increase."

Given the administration's enthusiasm for U.S. primacy, it is hard to see exactly where the United Nations fits in. Long after the Gulf War ended, President Bush said that "the coalition effort established a model for the collective settlement of disputes." This model, however, bears little resemblance to what the UN founders had in mind. The Security Council did not take the lead in opposing Iraq; Washington did. (Bush didn't even mention the UN in his original announcement on August 8 that the U.S. was deploying troops to Saudi Arabia.) And the Security Council did not run the war in the Gulf; the Bush administration did. The whole Gulf expedition, as U.S. officials repeatedly stressed, hinged on U.S. resolve and activism. As a consequence, Operation Desert Shield/Storm can hardly be considered an ideal example of collective security in action. "Collective security cannot be dependent upon a U.S. secretary of state flying 100,000 miles over the many long months to build the necessary coalition for an enforcement action," observes David Scheffer of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

To be equitable, as the UN Charter envisions, collective security responsibilities cannot be chiefly the burden of the United States, especially given its economic problems. To be effective, operating automatically in the face of all transgressions, a collective security model must be able to function when U.S. vital interests are not at stake. Whether a nation exports oil to the West or bananas to India, it should be assured of assistance to counter aggression.

President Bush must be praised for his new attentiveness to the UN. He was right on target when he said in September 1990 that "we are now in sight of a United Nations that performs as envisioned by its founders." The end of the cold war unlocked the potential of an institution which has stood essentially moribund from its earliest days. But before that potential can be realized, the president—and the U.S. foreign policy establishment generally—clearly have a long way to go. In a sense, Washington must take a leap of faith; it must place its trust in the politics of cooperation and the rule of law as it has never done before. It must believe that both U.S. security and prosperity are best assured, in the long run, within a genuine partnership of nations.

During the cold war such experimentation would have been risky, if not impossible. Yet now, with no mortal enemies on the horizon, the United States can move boldly to redefine world politics.

DAVID CALLAHAN

*David Callahan is the author of* Dangerous Capabilities: Paul Nitze and the Cold War (*HarperCollins*). *He is currently completing a book on the Persian Gulf War and the future of American foreign policy.*

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**OF SEVERAL MINDS** David R. Carlin, Jr.

# A CHOICE IN RHODE ISLAND

## CARLIN'S LIFE & HARD TIMES

From time to time in this space I have made mention of my favorite vice: I have spent the last eleven years as a member of the Rhode Island Senate. I hope you won't mind if I use this column to give you an update.

I would love to bring you up to date on Rhode Island politics generally, but unfortunately neither one column nor many columns would suffice for the melancholy/hilarious task. For to get you up to speed on the full list of scandals and other bizarre happenings that have rocked our state, I would have to tell you about the mayor of Providence, who, after having been forced out of office because of a felony conviction in 1984, became a popular radio talk show host and was eventually reelected to his old job; about the former chief justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court (the state's highest court), who, under threat of impeachment because of mob connections, was forced to resign in 1986; about the mayor of Pawtucket, who was convicted recently for being the center of a ring of extortion and bribery; about the governor who was defeated for reelection in 1990 and recently fined $30,000 by the state Ethics Commission for steering contracts to his campaign contributors; about a judge who was recently convicted of a felony; about another judge who has been indicted for taking bribes; about the collapse of much of our banking system; about the banker, with ties on the



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one hand to the mob and on the other to the former governor's office, who disappeared in November 1990 after apparently embezzling more than $12 million from his bank, thereby triggering the banking system collapse; about the insiders, some of them prominent political figures (including one of my colleagues, the president pro tempore of the Senate) who withdrew large sums of money on the eve of the collapse; and finally, about another of my colleagues—the state senator who was arrested in a drugstore for shoplifting condoms. (Yes, dear reader, condoms. That's not a typo. And by the way, although this extremely well-publicized event took place only a few months before the 1990 election, his voters were kind enough to return him to office by an overwhelming margin.)

You will forgive me for not telling this story; I don't have enough time or space. You will also forgive me, I hope, for not detailing my own political adventures in the past few years: how I was elected majority leader of the Senate by my Democratic colleagues following the 1988 elections; how my fellow Democrat and rival for the post (the son, incidentally, of the chief justice who resigned under threat of impeachment) teamed up with the Republican governor (the one recently fined $30,000 by the Ethics Commission) to create a coalition of minority Democrats and Republicans which controlled the Senate during 1989-90, leaving me with the majority leader title but scant power; and finally, how I lost the title itself following the 1990 elections.

Now if you are in my situation, there are two possible things you can do. On the one hand, you can write a comic opera based on your experiences; on the other, you can run for Congress. The former is obviously the better way; but as I am musically untalented, I have opted for the latter.

I am running as a Democrat for the U.S. House seat currently held by a second-term Republican, Congressman Ronald K. Machtley. It's traditionally a Democratic district, and it looks like George Bush will run especially poorly in our state; so, provided I am the Democratic nominee, my chances are not bad. On the other hand, my opponent is an incumbent, with all the many advantages of incumbency. He'll have much more money than I'll have, and

*"What a party! Talk about spirit of big Government!"*

members of Congress who run for reelection are almost never defeated.

Regular readers of this column will recall that I have discussed the abortion question many times; but up till now I have never had to deal with it as a practical question in my own political life. My purely theoretical attitude is about to come to an end. Not only will the pending U.S. Supreme Court decision in the Pennsylvania case thrust the abortion issue front and center in an election year, but the Republican incumbent in my district has a solidly pro-abortion voting record in the House. And to top things off, since my views on the subject (which may be described as moderately prolife) are of course not acceptable to the pro-abortion wing of the Democratic party, I now have an announced opponent in the primary—a young man who is a member of the board of directors of Planned Parenthood of Rhode Island, which is one of the two busiest abortion providers in the state.

I have just used the term "pro-abortion," which is a departure from my usual usage of "prochoice." In the past I have made a point of saying "prochoice" for two reasons: first, as a matter of courtesy—if that's the name they prefer for themselves, then that should be their name; second, though I have disagreed with their decision to give priority to choice over probable human life, still choice is a very great value, and it is to their credit that they recognize it.

But I've changed both my mind and my linguistic usage. First, the pro-abortion folk generally refuse to return the courtesy; you can call them "prochoice" all day long, but they will continue calling you "antichoice," not "prolife." Second, it turns out they are very selective in the application of their doctrine of free choice; thus they insist that taxpayers pay for certain abortions, thereby denying choice to those taxpayers who believe that abortion is a species of homicide.

Most important of all, though, is that "prochoice" is a fatally ambiguous term, covering a wide variety of attitudes and masking the abyss that separates the hard-core pro-abortion types from the rest of the population. It frequently happens that people who are far from being proponents of abortion on demand describe themselves as prochoice. They would like to see abortion remain legal in some cases and become illegal in others, especially when it takes place late in the pregnancy or for trivial reasons. But since they favor choice in some situations, they see themselves as prochoice. When these people hear the radical pro-abortion party describe itself as prochoice, they naturally assume they must be in agreement on the question, not realizing that the pro-abortion party favors abortion on demand, including no restrictions on late abortions (e.g., at six months) or abortions for trivial reasons (e.g., sex selection).

Somehow the words must be found to distinguish those who favor legalized abortion in any way and all situations from those who favor it in some situations only. For the time being I am calling the former "pro-abortion" while reserving the term "prochoice" for the latter.

And just to tie the first part and the second part of the column together, let me add that high rates of white collar crime and abortion are two parts of the same cultural package. They are two manifestations of America's increasing incapacity to tell the difference between right and wrong. □



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# SMALL CHANGES, BIG LOSSES

## BUTCHER, BAKER, DRESSMAKER

The receptionist at the dentist has told me that she is retiring and I feel suddenly bereft. Lois has been a presence in my life for so many years—a small and occasional presence, to be sure, but a familiar, pleasant, reassuring presence as she patiently juggled appointments and cancellations, doing her best to reconcile the doctor's schedule with mine. Even, at times, a comforting presence.

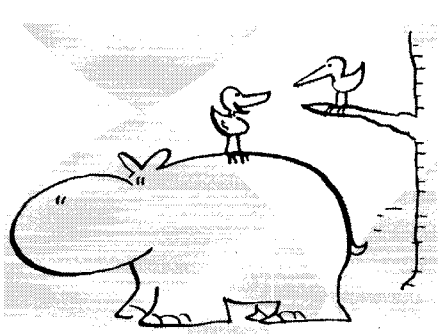
Her immediate departure has set me to ruminating about the many people who play these small supportive parts in our lives, who ease us through the years without demanding involvement. Our relatives, friends, and co-workers make demands of a sort on us. We are expected to share their lives in a greater or smaller measure and to respond to their needs in proportion to the depths of our relationships with them. These others require no more than the acknowledgment of acquaintanceship and small talk, if that. We often know little about them. And yet their going causes a kind of dislocation in our lives.

I think of the department store that closed here recently (a casualty of the Canadian Campeau's rampage through our retail world). It was a venerable Washington institution. Many of the sales clerks had worked no place else and many of the customers shopped no place else. They knew each other. Longtime residents were at home in the branch nearest us. They knew where everything was. They knew they were safe there from the "hard sell" and the "pushing" of unsuitable merchandise. They knew that Annie, head of alterations, would do everything she could to fit them into clothes they liked. Suddenly all that was gone and, a bit disoriented, those of us who were regular customers had to look for what we needed in other, less welcoming places. (When a friend and I came across Annie at work in another store, the glad cries of mutual rediscovery startled other shoppers.)

I think of the neighborhood grocery where the meat man kept track and called to remind us when it was time to order our home-raised, fresh Thanksgiving turkey. Gone now. (The younger generation of owners are running an upscale deli in the suburbs.) And the bakery where we ordered birthday cakes and hand-packed ice cream is gone, too. And gone the owners and clerks who recognized the faces and voices of frequent customers.

We adjust to these changes, to people coming and going over a lifetime: household helpers, baby-sitters, the teller and manager at the bank, the friendly man at the gas station, the neighborhood pharmacist, the newspaper carrier, doormen, and janitors. None, perhaps, was meant to be permanently in our lives. Each is there for a time only as part of the web of exchange between givers of services and the recipients.

As I think of these things, people have come back into my mind who appeared and mattered in my life and then disappeared. There was, for example, Ethel, the motherly dressmaker who designed and remodeled dresses for women with many obligations and limited budgets. Visits to Ethel were a pleasure. A warm interest in us and our children was soothing. Her reminiscences of her girlhood in middle-class black Washington were a delight. She talked of school plays, games, and dances, and of family picnics when they took the streetcar to the end of the line laden with baskets of fried chicken and biscuits and jars of lemonade. Eventually her neighborhood became too dangerous and she moved away.



*"Oh, he's* very *supportive!"*

There was Nelson, the neighborhood handyman. Given opportunity, Nelson could have been a landscape designer or an engineer. He encouraged us to launch projects he hankered to carry out—to build a terrace or a wall, to plant a hedge—sometimes successful, sometimes disastrous. He came into the neighborhood before most of us were up and made his headquarters in the kitchen of a neighbor down the street who was his original employer. He was on call to cut the grass, fix the balky lawn mower or broken toy, get the leaves out of the gutter, deal with blown fuses, rescue the kitten stranded in a tree—what have you. When we moved he came to help us a few times but he wasn't comfortable in a new neighborhood. So he, too, was gone.

These exchange connections worked the other way, too. I realize there were those to whom I was the person of service and they, the recipients. Some loomed large for a time—the principal I admired and the principal for whom I had little respect. There were high school and college students, important to me and challenging for a year or two and then on their way (although connections with some of these have held over the years). There were editors, agents, fellow club members, members of prayer groups and study groups and boards...so many people.

This succession of connection and change over the years takes its toll, I think. One person with whom I discussed this aspect of our lives was certain that it was evidence of our interdependence, testimony to the unity of humanity in the Teilhardian sense. It may well be.

But change in places once important to us affects us, too. There are, over a lifetime, an increasing number of once-loved places to which we can never return. It is an axiom that change is the law of life. Yet changes, great and small, assault and discomfort us. Is it because, as another friend suggests, that we came forth from the fixed and unchanging and ache for its surety until we return? □



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# WHO'S DOING CATHOLIC THEOLOGY?

## AND WHY, HOW & WHERE?

ROBERT J. EGAN

The word "theology" means discourse about the divine mystery, an organized way of thinking and talking about God, or the gods. But divinity is never, in the first place, a speculative question for human beings; it is always, first of all, a question about how we are living and what we are doing. So theology arises as a question in the context of some concrete way of being religious. As a kind of discourse, it concerns self and others, God and world, all at once.

Theology can be understood as a disciplined way of thinking and talking about the practice of our religious faith: asking questions about it and trying to answer them in the context of our own time and culture. It is "faith seeking understanding," a faith which is only possible within a community and within a tradition. Who are we? What do we believe? Why do we do certain things? What do we mean when we say certain things? Are the claims we are making intelligible and believable in the contemporary situation? Whether to ourselves or others? Whenever we ask such questions, or others put such questions to us, and we try to answer them through reflection and conversation, and by reference to memory and experience, we are doing theology together.

This means theology is a secondary phenomenon. It presupposes the embodiment of the way we live our lives and a primary kind of religious language, in which trust, amazement, gratitude, and love come into speech. Only then can questions arise which require reflection—and then perhaps also: discussion, research, prayer, analysis, and argument. Theology is not so much the faith we are practicing, but more the conversation we are having together about this practice, which of course, in turn, may inform and reshape this practice.

In a previous *Commonweal* article (March 8, 1991), I tried to give several reasons why people don't read serious theology any more. There I mentioned the inherent difficulty of its subject matter, the complexity and diversity of the intellectual frameworks it employs, its fragmentation and specialization, and its marginalization in current intellectual debate, as well as the bad prose style of many theologians. In addition I mentioned the very significant changes that have occurred in the last twenty-five to thirty years in the practice of Catholic theology. These have enriched theology, but they have also added to its difficulty and its pluralism. I want to return to this topic now and look at three of these changes in the way theology is done nowadays, especially in the United States, and to consider some of their implications. These changes concern those who do theology, where they do it, and with what authority they do it.

ROBERT J. EGAN, S.J., *is assistant to the academic vice-president and teaches fundamental theology and spirituality at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington.*

## Who does theology?

If the membership of the Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA) is a rough indication, there are around fifteen hundred Catholic theologians in the United States. Who are they?

In traditional societies there is a fundamental distinction between the elites, those few important people who (in their own eyes) say and do memorable and decisive things, and the countless others who do not, the common people. The ability to read and to write long texts in these societies is usually rather rare. It belongs mainly to professional scribes and an urban intelligentsia. In these societies, theology, like other kinds of literacy and learning, is confined to small groups of specialists, who are usually associated in some way or other with the world of the wealthy and the powerful—though the Christian ascetic and monastic traditions in some ways modify this connection. Still, for most of church history, theology has been of concern primarily to a small minority of educated believers. Theologians were among the "learned few."

Besides this, Catholic theologians have usually been priests. Before Vatican II, the charism of the priest was thought to be appropriate for the public service in the church performed by the theologian. This means that, until recently, Catholic theologians have usually been: unmarried men who felt called to public ministry in the church, who had the talent and interest to do serious intellectual work, who were educated as priests and



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ordained, and who having pursued higher studies successfully became university or seminary teachers. This was a small pool within a small pool from which to recruit for the theological enterprise.

In the last twenty-five years, this picture has changed dramatically. More and more lay people (including women religious) have finished graduate studies in theology and entered the field. This means that Catholic theologians are now both men and women, both single and married. They have studied at Catholic seminaries and universities, but also at Protestant divinity schools and state and private universities in this country and abroad. Now they teach in most of these places as well. Even though priests still outnumber lay members in the CTSA, something has happened that has broken theology's inner connection with church office. Quite apart from the percentages, there has been something like a "laicization" of theology.

This is a momentous change, but it's something we have not reflected much about as it was happening. Many factors were involved. A sharply increasing number of American Catholics were going to college and into graduate studies. It became more and more odd to speak of them as the "simple faithful." The general intellectual climate of the church was changing; and the priest in this situation was less and less easily perceived as being in a parental role in relation to "the many."

Also, in the 1950s and '60s, Catholic colleges and universities began to improve the quality of their theology departments. Before that time, they had been mainly catechetical in their orientation, staffed mostly by priests without research degrees, who explained and defended Catholic beliefs and moral norms in a sequence of required courses. Gradually these departments came under critical scrutiny according to standards applied throughout the universities. It became necessary to hire faculty with doctorates and to establish professional criteria for hiring, promotion, and tenure. By the '60s, students at many Catholic universities were being exposed to all the latest developments in Catholic moral thought, biblical scholarship, and systematic theology. New graduate programs in theology became possible and were opened to qualified lay students. Summer schools of theological and pastoral studies began to flourish.

In addition, at many non-Catholic universities, Catholic chaplains or Newman Clubs were sponsoring lectures, discussions, and courses on issues in contemporary theology and aspects of the Catholic heritage. At some of these universities, recent developments in philosophy and science have tended to restore intellectual and moral seriousness to religious questions viewed broadly and in multicultural terms. During these same years, many secular universities created new religious studies departments which offer courses in a wide range of religious traditions. At the same time, many Catholic seminaries and schools of theology that before had admitted only men preparing for ordination now opened their classes to lay men and women as well. This was an astonishing innovation—an invasion of the ecclesiastical inner sanctum. And, in the same years, more and more Catholics—both priests and lay people—were entering doctoral programs in theology and religious studies at places like Harvard, Yale, and Chicago.

Within a surprisingly short time, Catholic theology went through a sea-change. There was a new variety among Catholic theologians, who now brought different life-experiences to the field, along with a wide range of new questions, assumptions, and causes. For the first time it became possible, as a matter of course, for Catholic women to pursue theological studies, and for young Catholics, men and women both, to aspire to be theologians and to be married. Catholics were increasingly studying in ecumenical settings and programs; their teachers and classmates were more and more diversified. New voices were heard in the conversation. Not only had the windows been flung open, but the *doors* as well.

Theology was being dislocated and relocated among the wider People of God. It was no longer an exclusively clerical form of discourse. Yet something valuable has been endangered in this transition. Theology has tended to become primarily an academic specialization. One enters the field by doing graduate work in an accredited institution and, usually, by being hired by another one. But it is no longer possible to predict what all these people will have studied or to take for granted a sense of common heritage or a shared frame of reference. There are no requirements involving tact, prayer, spiritual formation, prior philosophical studies, or accumulated pastoral experience. Theology is no longer—necessarily—conceived as an ecclesial vocation and ministry. No one has the responsibility to make judgments about the maturity, prudence, or courage of the aspirant. Of course there is nothing to prevent a lay theologian from having impeccable tact, a cultivated interior life, a regular spiritual director, a serious philosophical education, or a practical involvement in ecclesial ministries. But nothing in their theological education will require it; and nothing in their job-descriptions will mention it. It is no longer part of the way theology as such is being institutionalized. This brings us to our second question.

## Where is theology done?

In what kind of places do we find theologians? Over the centuries theology has been institutionalized in very different settings: from the schools of late antiquity and the households of bishops, through the great monastic centers of the Middle Ages and the cathedral schools, to the new universities of the thirteenth century and afterwards, then to the separated and more specialized seminaries, theologates, and divinity schools of the modern period, and now to some extent back into the departments of universities, and into publishing houses, professional societies, journal offices, scholarly conferences, and research institutes, as well as into the lives and struggles of local Christian communities.

Each of these contexts helps to shape the conception of theology being practiced, what it takes for granted, and what it aims to achieve. The pursuit of holiness and the invigoration of pastoral service were the primary framework of its reflection for the first millennium. In this long history, monks complained



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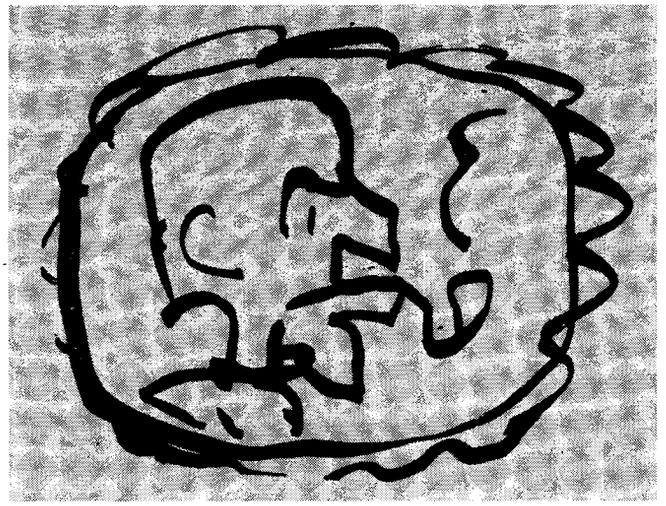

about the vain, speculative theology of intellectuals, who in turn complained about the naiveté and primitivism of monkish theology. Eventually, monastic theology itself became highly sophisticated, weaving together "the love of learning and the desire for God." Yet after the rise of the universities in the medieval period, an entirely different kind of sophistication was required. Logic, argument, and scientific knowledge created the new framework for theology; and ever since then complaints have been raised in the church about the arrogance and rationalism of "academic theology." For all that was gained in critical intelligence and systematic reflection, theology and spirituality have tended to go in separate ways—to their mutual detriment.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, theology began to migrate from the universities to the more specialized settings of seminaries and divinity schools. The credibility of theology as a serious intellectual enterprise was being threatened by the new philosophies and sciences and by a more skeptical and privatized attitude toward religion. As the influence of the German model of the research university spread, the place of theology in the university was increasingly questioned and attacked. As a result, it tended to institutionalize itself elsewhere as professional education for priests and ministers, so much so that the phrase "theological education" became barely distinguishable from the idea of training clergy.

In these settings, seminaries and divinity schools, theology has developed into a maze of more specialized inquiries—in biblical studies, church history, fundamental theology, systematic theology, moral theology, spiritual theology, pastoral theology, liturgical theology, homiletics, counseling, canon law, and various related disciplines. The quality of these programs varies a great deal from one place to another. Some schools are practical to the point of being anti-intellectual; some are hyper-intellectual to the point of being wildly impractical. Some create an ethos of piety and healthy-mindedness; some encourage disdain for most actually existing forms of Christian faith. Some are among the most important centers of serious theological research and reflection in the world. Even now the divinity school remains what Van Harvey has called "the agenda-setting institution for theology."

Certainly through the middle of this century the primary institutional setting of *Catholic* theology was the seminary or religious house of studies, places where candidates were educated for holy orders. Not only were theologians mostly priests, therefore, but their intended audiences were mainly other priests and seminarians. In this environment, a strong contrast tends to develop between "us" (the insiders) and "them" (the people out there). By custom and habit, a distinction may come to be made between what "we" say "among ourselves" (or in "scholarly journals") and what "we" say "to them" (or in the "mass media").

This split was reinforced by the peculiar form this theology took in seminary classrooms. Even thirty years ago, it was still being taught, written, and discussed in Latin; beyond that, it was conceived in the technical language of neo-Scholasticism. The subject matter of this theology was divided into several treatises; each treatise usually occupied the span of one semester. The treatises were divided into theses, twenty to thirty short propositions, which were listed, explained, and defended in approved textbooks. Students memorized these theses and were expected to be able to explain and defend them in oral examinations and to refute stock adversaries. In these programs, the courses in dogma were the serious courses, and everything else was, at best, secondary.

This system emphasized clarity, certainty, and obedience. It gave great importance to definitions, distinctions, appeals to authorities, unchanging verbal formulae, passages quoted out of context, and proofs. Even in this system, of course, extraordinary things could happen—as the work of Bernard Lonergan and Karl Rahner shows—but in many places a tyranny of mediocre minds took over the scene. In general, American Catholic seminaries were notable neither for their intellectual caliber nor for their pastoral relevance. The antimodernist campaign had successfully stifled the boldness and deep honesty a living theology requires.

But the Latin and the neo-Scholasticism have faded now; and in the last twenty-five years many Catholic seminaries—now fully two-thirds of them—have decided to admit lay students and religious, sometimes even into their Master of Divinity programs, which are conceived as professional programs preparing students for ecclesial ministry. Today full-time lay students make up over a fifth of those studying at Catholic theologates. Many young Catholics, especially women, have also been studying "for the ministry" at Protestant seminaries. So in addition to lay theologians, we now have a large number of "lay people" in the church who have been, in some sense, "formed for ecclesial ministry." These bewildering developments—what is a "professionally" trained "lay" minister?—also affect the contexts in which theology in general is studied and taught.

Over the past two-and-a-half decades, the center of gravity in the practice of theology has shifted more and more away from the seminaries and toward the university. The growth of religious studies as a field has helped create space for theological disciplines in secular schools. In addition, most of the two-hundred-and-thirty-some Catholic colleges and universities in this country have made the serious study of theology an ordinary part of the



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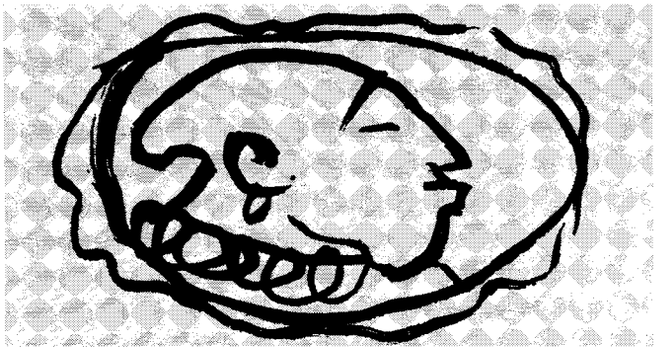

undergraduate curricula for all students. Many of these schools now have large, strong departments, well-attended master's-level programs, and year-long renewal programs. Eight of them now have doctoral programs in theology: Catholic University, Notre Dame, Boston College, Marquette, Fordham, Duquesne, St. Louis, and Loyola (Chicago). These have become important centers for the theological enterprise.

There are advantages and disadvantages to these new developments. Theology may be able to come out of its social isolation and its identification with the training of clergy. It may be able to take its place again as a serious intellectual discipline in the wider culture. Theologians are able to work alongside historians, scientists, philosophers, literary critics, and scholars in many other fields. Yet in the contemporary university the place of religion in general and theology in particular remains uncertain and heatedly contested. Theology's credentials are constantly being challenged, and it loses much of its energy defending its elemental plausibility to learned skeptics. University teachers are among the least religious people in the nation; and it seems clear that universities have been an important agency of secularization in this country. And although this may be less true of Catholic universities, Avery Dulles has said recently that most of *them* are drifting inevitably toward "total secularization."

How will Catholic theology maintain its identity, its integrity, in this context? In these Catholic colleges and universities, the members of the theology faculty may or may not be Catholics themselves. They may or may not have concerns about the practice of faith or the life of the church. They work in an ethos that emphasizes professionalism, pluralism, and academic freedom. Their "religious beliefs" are private matters. The same is true in secular and interdenominational schools.

There are profound differences among these theologians, of course, even within the Catholic community. But Catholics practice their faith in a bigger world. A complex ecumenical discussion is inescapably part of the world of Catholic theology today. This ecumenical discussion is most advanced among the Christian churches, but more and more it also includes a dialogue with other religious traditions—Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, among others—as well. And concerns about tolerance, social justice, and human rights, and a desire to be critical of our own assumptions, have helped advance a dialogue with people who have no religious affiliations and who may be quite suspicious of religious claims. This means that in practice the maintenance of Catholic identity has become more ambiguous and, in some ways, more obscure. Everyone who takes seriously the cognitive dimension of Catholic faith acknowledges the need for some kind of boundary-maintenance. But is there a discussable, nonauthoritarian way of doing this?

Several important articles have appeared on the future of Catholic theology in the United States, including articles in *America* by Robert Wister and by Thomas O'Meara (both, February 3, 1990), and Matthew Lamb (May 26, 1990). These writers warn that the practice of authentic Catholic theology is now on shaky ground in the American Catholic community. It has begun to lose its familiar institutional modes of expression, confirmation, and transmission. There is little support for serious research and publication. There is pressure toward "neutralization" at Catholic universities. Whatever is distinctive of the Catholic imagination and culture threatens to vanish, as these authors see it, in a genial cosmopolitan blur. Being Catholic becomes something entirely private, a personal preference, an interior attitude or sense of allegiance; it loses its ability to shape the ethos of a whole community. We need to ask ourselves: What are the institutional conditions of possibility for the faithful maintenance of Catholic identity in theology?

Now many people speak of doing theology in new places. Vividly aware of the limits and temptations of academic theology, they urge a practice of theology that is rooted in the daily life and commitment to justice of a local community or organized movement. Of course, these need not be forced options. But beyond what is done in the seminary and the university, there is a kind of theological activity that needs to be connected to a community, to a shared spirituality, and to a prophetic mission in the world. The foundations of theology shift from authority to experience, but then from experience to the suffering of the oppressed and to the awakening of a deeper life in each of us.

This new kind of theology must include a heightened awareness of sociological factors and political responsibilities which has made all theologians more self-critical. The old dual loyalties which theologians experienced with other intellectuals and other believers have been complicated by an awareness of other more questionable loyalties—of nationality, class, race, status, and gender. To understand the meaning of the gospel it is necessary to be transformed, to die to an old self and be born anew. The recovery of the prophetic dimension of faith has made more urgent the recovery of the mystical dimension of faith as well.

## Why listen? Why care?

Finally: with what authority do theologians teach? In life, if someone answers our questions credibly, we are thankful and we go on with our lives. But it is also possible to step back and ask: Says *who*? Why should I listen to *you*? Why should I care about *your* answer? These are questions—why should we listen? why should we care?—about authority.



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From the beginning, Christian speech and theology have been tangled up with the issue of authority. Prophets speak on behalf of God, even in the face of human power. This inescapably raises questions about authority. Cutting through layers of taken-for-grantedness, prophetic language reconstructs the very meaning of authority. The speech of Jesus raises this kind of question: Who has it right about how we stand with God? Whose version should we trust?

What is at stake in theology is our understanding of the gospel, which we see as a testimony and a revelation. The truth we live together as Christians we have from God on the authority of Jesus; and this truth, though it is proclaimed from the rooftops, remains a mystery, overflowing the mind's capacity with its fullness. So the question arises inevitably: Who has really fathomed this mystery—which Jesus himself taught in parables? Who really speaks with authority about the meaning of the gospel?

Furthermore, this gospel is not merely about how things stand. It is primarily about the ongoing story of *salvation*. Christian theology is reflection on a messianic movement, erupting into history, that carries a word of God's action and that aims at change: liberation, transformation, sanctification, reconciliation. What we are living together as a gift—God's own life—becomes for us both a mystical path to follow and a prophetic mission in society. So what does it mean to speak with authority about this new thing that is happening through Christ in the Spirit?

Authority is a thorny problem in Catholic theology today, and here it is only possible to touch on a few points; but in talking about the practice of theology, it cannot be avoided. In any human community there are always different kinds of authority, which is to say, reasons for listening to someone and caring. There is, for example, an authority which comes from study, from close attention and long familiarity, from thought and argument, from competent investigation, from being good at what one does. Let's call it, in this context, "the authority of the scholar." Then there is an authority that comes from virtue and character, from wisdom of the heart, from contemplative or prophetic vision, from compassion and suffering. Let's call it "the authority of the saint." And then there is an authority that comes from a role of leadership that one might be asked to play within a community, from an office of responsibility, with all its burdens and graces and hazards. Let's call it, here, "the authority of official leadership."

These three kinds of authority can come together, as they do in a learned and holy bishop. But they do not always. These types of authority can be pitted against each other—there are such conflicts in the story of Jesus himself as recorded in our Gospels. They can be blurred and faked and used to serve the interests of the powerful. It is never possible for these different kinds of authority to be neatly ranked and subjected to one another. The authority of intelligence and study, the authority of wisdom and holiness, the authority of office and responsibility: these are always part of the texture of religious living. They all have


MARY GORDON

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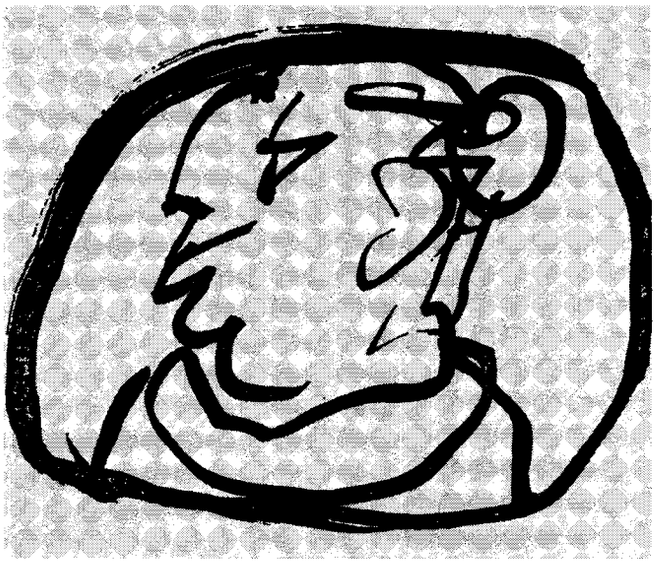

a legitimate place in the conversation.

These three types of authority also correspond to three different types of answers that might be given to our questions about the faith, and three different ways in which answers might be found satisfying: emphasizing the fuller engagement of our minds with the truth, the fuller conversion of our hearts to the good, or the rootedness of the tradition in the whole community and its reception of the integral apostolic testimony. Considered as alternatives, these can lead to an arid cleverness, a pious sentimentality, an autocratic lazy-mindedness. Considered as a whole, though, and shared among God's People, gathered in the knowledge, love, and service of one God, they can lead to more abundant life.

In regard to these issues of authority, the laicization of theology has been confusing. In the past, a theologian was almost always a "teacher of the faith" not only as a scholar of the tradition but also as an officeholder in the church. Those who hold offices of public leadership in a religious community have the authority and the responsibility to speak on behalf of the community and its tradition. They interpret the meaning of the faith with a double authority: the authority of their competence as intellectuals and the authority of their leadership role within the community. If they are believably good and holy people, they speak also with the elusive but powerful authority conferred by sanctity. (In some of its earliest uses, now rather forgotten, "theologians" were people who knew God from their own experience.) This *compacted* authority, in fact, was one of the most characteristic features of theology.

All theologians have serious responsibilities; but as an interpreter of the faith who is also a representative of the church, the priest-theologian plays a more complex role. It makes sense that when a priest-theologian is widely perceived to be crossing the boundary of orthodoxy, it should be of concern to the church. This does not mean that threats, silencings, and firings are necessarily the most appropriate or effective responses, or that the judgment should usually be made at the highest level and taken out of the hands of friends and colleagues, professional societies, religious superiors and local ordinaries, or the agencies of regional bishops' conferences. When this much distrust invades the church, it tends to create a climate of suspicion, anxiety, and cynicism. But this does not mean that the church should remain indifferent to the claims made by its official representatives.

If a theologian is not a priest, but a Catholic (say a laywoman) who has a doctorate in theology (say from Yale) and who is teaching (say at Northwestern or the University of California at Santa Barbara), then it would seem even stranger for a bishop or a Vatican agency to threaten or try to sanction her. We would be shocked if Rome ordered her not to speak publicly for a period of time (under threat, say, to annul her marriage); and most of us would be dismayed or indignant if she were fired from her job for the views she expressed. But is she not, in some serious sense of the phrase, a "Catholic theologian"? Would it make a difference if she taught at a Catholic university (say Notre Dame)? Would she be held to a different standard than non-Catholics in the same department? And would young Catholics who dream of serving the church as theologians therefore generally be better off remaining lay people—and, perhaps, seeking jobs in non-Catholic institutions—to protect their freedom of conscience and speech?

These questions indicate the shift going on in our perceptions. Many of us Americans tend to think of theologians, now, as professional intellectuals who do their work in a public space. We emphasize their rights and their needed autonomy and we emphasize the importance of fair procedures. We do not want to hear a party-line from them—no one would believe it anyway. We expect not only competence, but also criticism, independence, and frankness. This affects even the way we now envision the role of priests who become theologians. We Americans do not expect our theologians to speak "for" the church exactly, but more concretely and modestly to speak for themselves. True, they speak about the loftiest things, the communal reception and enactment of God's own redemptive love and self-revelation in history, but they speak of these matters *in their own voices*. There are risks involved with this, but if a theologian does not speak in this way and with this kind of authority in American culture, as one adult to another, he or she will speak with no effective authority at all.

Our present confusions about authority erode the bonds of communion and mutual respect among us. Liberals tend to neglect the importance of these bonds, putting more energy into defending the rights of dissenters, minimalizing the danger of loss of identity, and making concessions to American individualism. Conservatives tend to remain attached to obsolete cultural forms of authority, minimalizing the contradiction between the gospel and authoritarian social orders, and further delaying the development of more adequate expressions of a Christian understanding of "authority." So we tend to become more and more a city of warring factions, limited interests, and halfhearted promises.

"Catholic" means whole. Our hearts have to learn how to include a lot of reality in order to be Catholic! If it is to be Catholic theology, it will have to go on in remembrance of all those who



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have gone before us in the faith, with whom we remain one family before the mystery of God. This crucial remembering of our whole history is essential for Catholicism. And it will have to go on in communion with all Catholics in every city, in every class, in every nation, in every subculture. This evangelical inclusiveness is also essential.

Today we are witnesses everywhere to a war of partial truths in the church. Single ideas become absolute standards and ruthless causes. The party of the mind battles the party of the heart; the party of the human Jesus battles the party of the divine Jesus. This produces a heated and disturbed view of one another, and a cacophony of vain and importunate claims, whipped up with sarcasm and displays of shock and dismay. American Catholicism, left and right, has an alarming propensity to stage these dramas nowadays.

In the last twenty-five years, Catholic theology has lost its "compacted" authority. In trying to find its voice again, it appeals now to a more differentiated and circumscribed kind of authority. It is no longer a monologue of the learned and the separated. It needs to be thought of, today, as a heartfelt, educated conversation—sometimes an argument—mediated by many teachers, writers, and pastoral workers, encompassing the whole community of faith. In a democratic culture, this is its best hope for an honest and a wholesome future.

If we think of the church as a system of communication, in which some raise questions and some others respond, carrying forward a prayerful conversation about the conduct of our common mission, helping one another to think what we are doing as Christians, it becomes apparent that, in our time, the system is breaking down again and very badly. How could this keep happening? The way theology is practiced is one element in this larger problem. Some things seem clear. The work of theology needs to be brought more into relationship with the prayer, discernment, action, and dialogue of the whole community as it defines itself in response to its cultural matrix. All kinds of authority need to be respected. In my previous article, I said: "We are used to treating theology as the virtuoso performance of solitary individuals. Now we have to conceive it as a social process." This is challenging; it will require new structures, new occasions, and new levels of trust and candor among us.

We need to think more about what it means to hand on a tradition in an age of historical consciousness and cultural pluralism. We need to think more about the idea of religious education and what canon law calls the "right" of all Catholics to a serious theological education. We need to think more about the role of listening and responding and the need for discernment in the tasks of theological reflection and ecclesial leadership.

Theologians are interpreters of God's Word; and the purpose of the Word is to redeem the imagination of our hearts—to gather us in communion, to summon us to conversion, and to inspire us to messianic mission. The effect of recent changes in the practice of theology has been to break open the Catholic arcana to the light of day. As a result, everyone is now required to develop a reverence for mystery and a more reflective relationship with the saving truths of the faith. Theology becomes everybody's business. If we are to prevent the dissipation of these saving truths, their dispersal in the surrounding secular air, we must somehow recover the idea of theology as a *habitus* of the Catholic heart and mind. We will have to bring theological education back in the direction of soul-making—of a mystagogy, as Karl Rahner argued, that initiates us into a deeper understanding of the faith.

If in the emerging church, membership will mean an active participation in the work of the church for everybody, theology will have to become a discourse guiding our Spirit-filled lives in new directions, an essential discipline for all the faithful, like setting our hearts on God's reign, breaking bread together, and forgiving our enemies. To do theology will mean to think what we are doing as God's family, to cultivate the common share of intelligence and wisdom we need today to be heralds and servants of more abundant life in American society. □

Walter Pavlich

## The Blessing of the Animals

The faux eyes of a French-made Mary look down on the
assembled.
The pastor intones, "An animal *is* and glorifies God

by its is-ness." No snarl answers, no not-as-yet seraphic yelp,
nor goat-butt over the chasm into grace. Side-by-side,

pew-after-pew, the lecherous unfixable tom alongside
the parrot astroturf green, police horse between

the thieving boa (pet mouse parked in its throat)
and maraschino cherry-eating poodle. While in East

Germany a deacon is dismissed for anointing the unwashed
nose leather of cats. Here, the ark redefined,

and this time a drought, so there will be threes
allowed this time, all odd quantities, a disabled burro,

fifty-nine flightless geese, one imprinted gay raven.
But the ship of the saved is not sailing. This is atonement

in place, with marble to clop on, organ to calm,
bells and echoes to scare. Hands raise over them:

"Blessed be the animals for their wildness
and furriness," and lifesaver-red light

from the stained glass sun glows on the side
of an unremorseful yet still redeemable pig.



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# NEARER THAN THE DOOR

A TOURIST IN IRELAND

JOSEPH CUNNEEN

It was a naive idea—to learn something about Ireland in two weeks. Like too many Irish-Americans, Sally and I were shamefully ignorant about the country; all we had were impressions based on a few of its modern writers. A long-time friend and native Irishman, however, arranged an itinerary that allowed us to see most of the country, rushing us north to Belfast after only a day-and-a-half in Dublin, then west to Donegal and Sligo, before proceeding to Mayo, Galway, Limerick, Cork, the Ring of Kerry and the Dingle Peninsula, and home from Shannon. The beauty and variety of the scenery were a revelation to us—palm trees and lunar landscapes, wilderness and carefully tended town gardens, and the sea everywhere—but better descriptions can be found in guidebooks. The question is: Did we learn anything?

A great deal, really, even though it may seem to bear out the familiar clichés. Like the Irish are a friendly, generous people, even more interesting than the scenery. One quickly picks up examples: a missionary sister, knowing we are worried about driving at night, takes us out to Maynooth and back to meet academics and journalists at dinner; a lady who ran a Limerick bed-and-breakfast and didn't have a room for us stops her car later that night and rushes across the street as we were walking back to our place—she was concerned about whether we'd found a room and wants to drive us to where we were staying; we ask a man on the sidewalk for directions in Cork and he jumps into his car, parked alongside, makes an illegal U-turn, and calls out, "Follow me!"

Other generalizations come linked with contradictions. There is such a strong sense of local pride that one might expect a deadening provincialism, but all sorts of people showed an informed interest in international developments. A retired nurse in Sligo, after expressing her satisfaction that divorce is still illegal in Ireland—liberalization would discourage young couples from working out their problems—denounces the South African government's financial support of opponents to the African National Congress and indicates heartfelt sympathy for "that poor Mr. Mandela." Clearly, Ireland's long experience of colonization induces many who are generally apolitical to sympathize instinctively with the third-world poor, whether in Central America or elsewhere. At the Galway Arts Festival, the Zimbabwe a cappella choir, Black Umfolosi, are delighted and amazed at the tumultuous response, which, they declare, surpassed any they have received outside of Africa. The traditional piety that produced a flood of vocations has resulted in many Irish priests and nuns becoming to some degree radicalized by their experience while serving in foreign missions. Church doors have posters on famine in Central Africa, and while there is no sympathy for Saddam Hussein, we meet frequent questions about the devastating U.S. bombing visited on ordinary people in Iraq.

Ireland remains tragically divided between North and South. Surprisingly, considering their internationalist sympathies, most of those living in the Republic respond to another headline of violence perpetrated by either Unionists or IRA irregulars fatalistically, as if the killing is taking place thousands of miles away. They are not quite apathetic but remain surprisingly passive, no doubt because the situation has not improved since the civil rights movement of the '60s and because their leaders offer no alternatives to the status quo. Since it's all new to us, we're more nervous than we need be as we drive past armed British soldiers on entering Northern Ireland, or encounter random road blocks driving around Belfast. Which doesn't mean that living there doesn't take its toll. A friend tells of how she is temporarily held up at the border by contemptuous British soldiers because she made the mistake of telling them she was going to Derry instead of using the approved name, Londonderry; it betrayed her "Catholic" sympathies.

We have the advantage of being shown around Belfast by friends—an American wife, her Belfast-born writer-husband, and their teen-age daughter, who have just arrived after living in Italy for several years. Jack guides us through the Catholic

*"I count my blessings every day, and I'm always a few short."*

JOSEPH CUNNEEN *is co-editor of* Cross Currents: Religion and Intellectual Life.



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slums, past his grammar school and the Catholic high school he attended—where Seamus Heaney had his first teaching job, and was teased by the city teen-agers because he was from the countryside. Mary has mixed feelings about bringing up her daughter in Belfast, but she and Jack emphasize the cultural vitality of the city, probably greater than Dublin's, in spite of—partly because of?—siege conditions. We have tea with Jack's sister, who's off with her husband and children for a weekend in the west of Ireland, across the border; we meet Jack's mother, who is proud of her educated author-son. She's getting ready to go dancing that night. Life goes on.

Some who have fought the good fight for years, building ecumenical networks, creating small areas of hope in a society dominated by institutionalized oppression of the minority, have grown understandably frustrated. We talk to a pacifist priest, desperate to see the British out even if it means a bloodbath. "It's hypocrisy to denounce IRA violence," he says. "Everyone subscribes to violence: the British, the Unionists, the Irish government, both Catholics and Protestants. Why has no one brought representatives of all sides together to work for gradual demilitarization of the conflict?" In his analysis the failure of both Dublin and the church to oppose the present system in the North—they do occasionally complain of individual excesses—is because a serious effort to build democracy in Ireland would force a critical overhauling of their own cozy relationship with the British government and the middle-class power structure. "If people are really against violence," he concludes, "they would be working night and day to build alternative, nonviolent, political means to force the British out."

A few are making such efforts, building for a future they may never see. We talk to a member of the Centre for Research and Development, founded by young people who had worked for nongovernmental organizations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and came back to Ireland to find out if what they had learned about development education couldn't also be useful there. They hope to be an enabling center for poor and marginalized communities, North and South, have issued a report on the economics of West Belfast, and have hosted a Dublin conference on the similarities and differences between Ireland and third-world countries.

Finally, Ireland remains a Catholic and patriarchal society. Even in the North, if population trends continue, Catholics may be a majority by 2020. Our Dingle landlady thinks it a selling point to have us meet her parish priest, who is having coffee with her in the parlor, before showing us our room. The priest complacently claims that 90 percent of the people in his parish go to Mass on Sunday—the estimate we were given for cities like Dublin and Belfast is 25 percent—adding that women should be given more credit for keeping the church going. Still, we're impressed with the crowd that fills the village church in Kerry—and with the sermon, which suggests that the miracle of the loaves and fishes had much to do with the people "coughing up their own rations." But Catholicism is inevitably perceived as part of the established order, and one can easily foresee a pattern of growing alienation as Ireland, with the youngest population in Europe, becomes increasingly tied to the European community and rushes to embrace the international youth culture.

Organized feminist groups would be hard to find outside of Dublin, but it is symptomatic that the Galway Film Festival is devoted to "Women and Film" and that a woman is in charge of the avant-garde Druid Theater. Though President Mary Robinson has no direct power, political leaders are worried about her growing popularity, and even prevented her from giving a BBC lecture on the present position of women. While families are large by U.S. standards, Irish women are having fewer children than their mothers. Those we meet fit no stereotype of the domestic drudge, but they represent the economically favored in a society in which 25 percent of the women are living below the poverty level. Who knows how much resentment has been built up by church teaching against contraception and the ecclesiastically influenced near-ban on abortion information.

Everywhere we meet the Ireland of the future, its lively, handsome, quick-witted children, not yet spoiled by consumer goods but whose images of the good life are increasingly shaped by U.S. mass media. What images of Christ and the church are they given, and what do they make of them? Hair-splitting over new language for a bill to be presented to the Dail, lowering the age limit for the purchase of condoms from eighteen to seventeen, is not apt to give them much respect for either government or religion. The danger is that as they perceive the preoccupation of church leaders with "holding the line" on sexual morality, they may come to see Christianity itself as an anachronism. On singing night in a Limerick bar we hear a ballad about emigration, "It's a long way from Clare to here," with its poignant line in which the narrator confesses he's going to Mass less often every year. The question concerns all the young, not just those who emigrate: are they interiorizing a personal faith, or is their Catholicism a leftover from an increasingly outmoded rural life-style?

Only a close and long-time observer of Irish young people could offer even a probable response. There are individuals and groups trying to prepare priests and teachers, parents and children, for the growing challenges of modernization, but a priest complains that Vatican II, despite its more liberal vocabulary, has become another trap, forcing people to conform to past formulations instead of envisioning new solutions to new situations. A long-time lay activist voices the lament, familiar to U.S. veterans of Catholic Action movements, that he and his wife seem to have passed on their values to their children but the latter find the church totally irrelevant to the living of these values. A Maynooth theologian sees little vitality emerging from below; when we offer the positive example of an older sister who speaks perceptively of contextual theology as an alternative to traditional abstractions, he insists that there are few younger women—or men—coming along to build on her work.

In the evenings after we reach another B-&-B, I read John McGahern's novel, *Amongst Women* (Viking, $17.95, 184 pp.), winner of *The Irish Times* Aer Lingus award, in which Moran, the central character, dominates his family out of pride and the need to be the center of attention. Although his daughters fear his moods, they internalize his sense of separateness and superiority; even after they leave his home, he remains the chief



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influence on their lives. He is not an evil man, but frightening in his need to control, his insistence on leading the family rosary even in the midst of violent family confrontations; the reader cannot help but conclude that the protective devotion of his wife and daughters is largely misplaced.

McGahern succeeds in making Moran all too credible, but the children we see on our route hardly seem cowed, the girls especially responding brightly to any invitation to humor. One must hope that Moran is a character from the past; the children of a contemporary Moran would find it hard not to rebel against the church. Is it a small note of hope that links between the generations still seem stronger than in the U.S., that the local Irish rock band drew an audience of all ages at the Galway festival, including many family groups?

Although offering no hard evidence on Ireland's religious future, one of our most rewarding visits is to Glenstal Abbey, not far from Limerick, where we attend the monks' community Mass, and rejoice to see that half the concelebrants are young men. An eighty-two-year-old Benedictine who refers to himself as "guestmaster emeritus" humorously indicates his familiarity with exaggerated Roman concerns for order but admires the intellectual precision of pre-Vatican II collects. "We need that quality, too," he concedes. He speaks of courage out of a lifetime of meditation: "Oh, there's no shortage of physical courage in Ireland; we'll shoot anyone you want. But we lack moral courage; we find it hard to stand up if the crowd is against us."

He is most alive in speaking of compassion and the Irish spirit of devotion. "God's power is never so much in evidence as in extending his mercy," he reminds us. "Rome prayed with the head in neat, precise formulas. The Irish prayed with the heart like the people on the Aran Islands, living in simple companionship with each other and God. God was nearer than the door," he concludes, translating an old Gaelic phrase.

But the door is opening now in Ireland—opened by long-repressed winds of change; as they rush out to create a new culture, will its men and women lose that sense of nearness? □


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## SCREEN

# BRILLIANT ODDITY

## TOLKIN'S 'THE RAPTURE'

I've just seen the most original, the most audacious, the most disturbing American film of the last two decades. And you haven't. And you're not going to, at least for a while. *The Rapture* has been swept out of sight by embarrassed, uncomprehending critics and financially strapped exhibitors. No blame to the latter for, after all, they must turn a dollar and Michael Tolkin's brilliant oddity will never fill an auditorium. Perhaps no blame should fall on the critics either, for what are yuppie, go-with-the-flow touts fed full on schlock (*The Terminator*, et al.), cynical pseudo-journalism (*JFK*), and highbrow kitsch (*Naked Lunch*) supposed to make of a film that is both pious and pitiless, an unabashed avowal of the existence of God and a blood-curdling horror movie, a triumph of suspenseful storytelling and one of the most personal reveries ever to flow across the screen? Nothing. And nothing, indeed, is what they have made of it. Let me try to do better by a movie that yields up its meanings no more glibly than life itself does.

It begins with the murmuring of names and numbers. The screen is dark for a few seconds after the credits have rolled. First shot: a room full of telephone operators, each one boxed in his or her little cubicle, dispensing information to callers. "What city do you want? How do you spell that name? Is that B as in boy?" The verbal protocol is hypnotically boring. The faces are attentive and vacuous. The voices are hushed and affectless. One might have walked by chance into a strange church where the congregation chants a liturgy that proclaims the supremacy of nothingness.

The camera comes to rest on one particular operator. Her countenance is open yet numbed, heavy, sensuous, dying of boredom. This is Sharon, played by Mimi Rogers.

We shift to Sharon's other existence. A connoisseur of sex devoid of all emotional content, she cruises the airports and bars of L.A. with her European partner, Vic, picking up other couples for group sex. The scenes of orgy have the lulled, slightly narcotized atmosphere of hard core pornography without hard core content. Though the nudity and groping are held to R-rated limits, it would be inept to suggest that these scenes are done in good taste. They are exciting yet revolting. There is an undercurrent to them that is sinister, even murderous. At any moment, one expects a participant to produce a straight razor and slit every throat in sight. Indeed, one of Sharon's pick-ups, a youth named Randy, does postcoitally confess to Sharon that he once killed a man for money, has repented, and is awed by his own capacity for evil. Sharon's response? She's mildly interested. The confession has brought a little variety to just another carnal afternoon. Nude and listless, she stretches out on her bed in the golden, declining sunlight in which Director Tolkin bathes the



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first hour of his movie, a light that seems to be trying to freeze time at 4:30 in the afternoon.

What really turns Sharon on is the *sotto voce* conversation of some of her co-workers. They are muttering about strange signs and coincidences and they hush up immediately whenever they notice that Sharon is eavesdropping. She senses that they are onto something and she wants to be in on it.

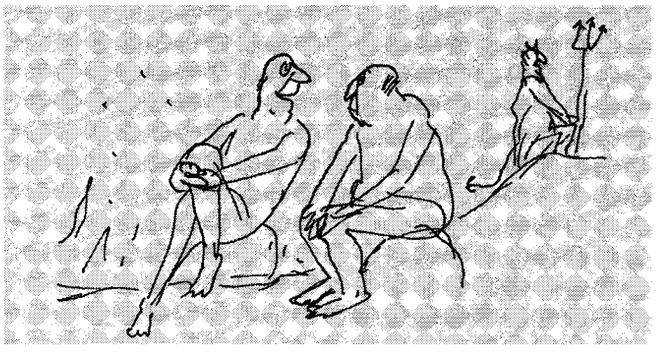
*It* turns out to be nothing less than the end of the world, the Apocalypse, the Four Horsemen, the last trumpet, the rising of bodies incorruptible, and all that St. John jazz. Sharon is utterly consumed by her discovery. She flees from it at first, then flees toward it as her salvation. Mimi Rogers, who at moments suggests a voluptuous Jill Clayburgh moving under water, captures Sharon's dividedness marvelously. She has a knack of making her bored, slightly adenoidal voice go suddenly tremulous with barely leashed hysteria as the inexplicability of life, of all human action tears at Sharon, fragmenting her personality. As she tells Randy (whom she's come to care about for more than his sexual services) that she is forsaking her hedonistic ways, Rogers flosses her teeth. It's a peculiar bit of business for a scene of lovers breaking up, but Rogers does it with a manic speed and compulsiveness that's subtly disturbing because it suggests that Sharon thinks she can clean up her character with the same efficiency with which she dislodges the food in her gums. (It's like a comic variant on Lady Macbeth's handwashing.)

Yet, as odd as this business is, it's a key to the meaning of the film. Sharon the believer is not really operating at a more profound level of existence than Sharon the orgiast. Once panicked by the nothingness that she felt was at the center of existence, she cruised and copulated. Now, even more panicked by the Something that will destroy Everything, she prays and prattles. Her born-again jag makes her radiant and charismatic when she isn't downright scary, and Randy, embracing her faith out of love for her, marries her. They have a gorgeous daughter, an utterly straight lifestyle, and a marriage of seemingly transcendent happiness. And, together with their fellow illuminates, they rapturously await the end of time.

But when the little girl asks her mother where heaven is, Sharon tells her that it's up in the sky, and seems to believe this herself quite literally. Wondering what she should wear at the Last Judgment, Sharon treats the Great Beyond as just a grandiose extension of the Here and Now. She's a hedonistic believer who thinks she's blessed when, in fact, she's only blissed. "If you're ironing shirts on the day the world ends," asks a sarcastic friend, "do the shirts get burned?" Replies Sharon, "I wear permanent press."

So far, so funny. But then the movie turns cruel, crueler than any film I have ever seen. Not physically sadistic but cruel in the way Flannery O'Connor's stories are. Like O'Connor, Tolkin punishes his characters for being shallow.

I won't describe the closing scenes in detail. Suffice it to note that Sharon, widowed by a hideous tragedy, goes into the desert with her daughter to experience the Apocalypse in utter tranquillity. Nothing happens. The sun beats down and Sharon is filled with doubt. She has kept her appointment, now why doesn't God keep his? More time goes by and more merciless heat and



*"Oh, I'm content, My life was a* living *hell."*

beating sunlight and more hunger and, angry at God as at a date who has stood her up once too often, Sharon kills her daughter, then tries to kill herself. But she can't blow her own brains out. Having killed her daughter, how can she face God's wrath? She speeds down the highway, gets arrested, is put in jail, declares to a cellmate that she no longer loves God.

And then the trumpet sounds. The Four Horsemen ride (on TV no less, interrupting a football game!). Angels wield swords of flame. The walls of her prison crumble.

Joined in the desert by the shade of her daughter, Sharon is transported to a nondescript place somewhere above the desert. "Do you know how long you will have to stay here?" the girl-ghost asks. Sharon nods: "Forever." The daughter vanishes. Sharon is left alone in a place that is not place. Forever. She is damned.

As I have stated, *The Rapture* is the most original film I've seen in years, but it isn't necessarily the greatest. (It doesn't have the diamond-hard perfection of *Open Doors*, for instance, or the Chekhovian humanity of *Tender Mercies*.) The fact that Sharon is surrounded in the first part of the film by so many people who just happen to know of the end of the world is a condition of her peculiar fate, of course, but it leads to moments of ludicrousness. Sometimes the plot shows its undergirdings, as when a compassionate neighbor, who has been hearing Sharon jabber about meeting death in the desert, offers her a revolver as protection against nocturnal animals. And the movie lurches perilously close to the visual texture of *Poltergeist* whenever angels or the Four Horsemen appear (though the very last scene is eerily, desolately perfect).

But these faults count as nothing against the innumerable ways that Michael Tolkin uses dialogue, acting (Will Patton's performance as a compassionate cop would have done for his career what *Easy Rider* did for Nicholson's had *The Rapture* been received instead of snuffed by the critics), and sheer cinematic technique makes Tolkin's story—veering as it does so close to the ridiculous—concrete, believable, mordantly funny, tense, pathetic and, finally, deeply disturbing.

Two brief instances of Tolkin's tact, a tact that verges on genius:

In the early scenes, Tolkin's camera unabashedly looks at Mimi Rogers in the nude. But, after her conversion, whenever the plot requires her to undress, the camera retreats, respecting her privacy.

Sharon is widowed in one of those disgruntled-employee mass



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killings that happen too often nowadays. When the madman walks down an office corridor, kicking doors open and firing guns into rooms, the slayings aren't shown. We barely hear the offscreen pleadings of the victims, see the gunfire, hear silence. The final victim, Randy, is killed on camera, but in long shot. Then the killer approaches the corpse and, in childish spite, kicks Randy's foot. *Only then* do we get a closeup: of the dead foot shaking briefly for a second from the force of the kick. So much life an instant ago, so much clay now. Thus does an artist convey the nightmare of violence.

What finally convinces me that *The Rapture* is a great film is that it is completely alien to my interests and temperament, and yet it held me spellbound. I am emphatically not drawn to eschatological speculation, and I do not think, as Tolkin apparently does, that God is a cruel examination monitor faking out the student who is trying to cheat in the back row. I reject everything about *The Rapture* except its artistry. But that is superlative.

RICHARD ALLEVA

## STAGE

# DOWN THE TUBES

BLUE MAN GROUP & 'PIECES'

When the advertisement for Blue Man Group's *Tubes* appeared last fall, it looked like a case of upward-mobility tidying. When I first saw Matt Goldman, Phil Stanton, and Chris Wink performing at Philadelphia's Movement Theatre International, as part of one of the P.S. 122 Field Trips, they called themselves simply Blue Man. I assumed that "Group" was added because Blue Man (or their producers) feared that the larger off-Broadway audience—unlike the one they customarily faced in the performance-arts venues—would be confused by the plural as singular. The "collectively known as..." in the program seems to confirm my suspicion. Yet the onstage combo, the more visible assistants, the female voice-over on a mock science film suggest *group* in the sense of *company*. *Tubes* is a classy and glitzy show, and a very successful one.

The three very funny men who make up the group are painted blue, which emphasizes the largely expressionless way in which they perform their grotesque routines. The heart of *Tubes* is the show that I saw in much simpler form at MTI. They and a volunteer from the audience stuff themselves on Twinkies and, then, through a tube in their overalls spew a disgusting looking mess that they proceed to eat hungrily. One of them throws food—a candy full of cake coloring, marshmallows—across the stage which the others catch in their mouths and then spit up to create works of art—a painting, a statue. They flash large cards full of platitudes, challenging the audience to try reading just one as the three keep turning over their message boards. These are only samples to whet your appetite for predigested Twinkies and flying marshmallows. At the Astor Place Theatre, where they are currently playing, they have much more equipment to work with—a screen for instance that can show action backstage—and tubes, tubes, tubes. Their set, designed by Kevin Joseph Roach from their concept, is the whole theater, lined with tubes along the walls; and there are tubes that they can play like vibes, contributing to the deafening sound level which the combo provides whenever voice-over is not needed. At the end, the tubes are released at the bottom, so that they hang down, waving madly, and the audience is covered with unrolling (toilet?) paper unfurled from the back of the auditorium; a strobe light cuts through the space and the group and the combo join in a sound assault. It is a grand hysterical finish, and the audience loves it.

The show had been running for a few months when I got to it, and it was obvious that the group had developed groupies—like those that keep turning up at Penn & Teller shows—who come delighted with the action before it begins. The intensity of Blue Man—their solemnity in earlier days—suggests that there may be more to the show than its gags and gadgetry. A critic with a stronger taste for significance-seeking than I have might make something of the skewed comments on art and communication, might cluck over the excesses of our consumer society, but whatever meaning *Tubes* has lies in the disintegrative function of comedy. And its integrative function. There was something a little scary about Blue Man when I first saw them, but Off-Broadway has made them likable. The appeal now is an occasion to release one's rigidities and what, after all, is *carnivale* for? Go if you want to loosen up. Take earplugs.

David Greenspan is a playwright with performance-art connections. Two of the long short plays that make up *The Home Show Pieces*, recently presented at the Public Theater, are solo pieces, performed by the author. In "Doing the Beast," he appears in bed, raunchy and alone, where his attempts to masturbate are regularly interrupted by phone calls. In "Portrait of the Artist," he sits on the toilet and contemplates his meager reception as a playwright (in fact, there were only a handful of people in the audience the night I saw *Pieces*), fantasizes the celebrity he says he does not want, talks to his offstage lover, and lipsyncs to Barbra Streisand "People Who Need People." The pieces are detailed, repetitious in a way that indicates a good ear for ordinary speech, sometimes funny, finally exhausting. Character 1, as this solo performer is called, appears again in "The Big Tent," this time played by a woman (Tracey Ellis) who discusses the play she/he is working on with his/her aunt (played by a man, Ron Bagden) and the offstage lover from the toilet turn (again Bagden), now onstage allowing for quick-change bits. Greenspan's fondness for sexual cross-casting, indicated in his production of *Gonza the Lancer* last season, seems more a trick than a revelation, although the autobiographical content his work (*Dead Mother*) suggests a confusion more complex than his homosexuality, which is one of his subjects in *Pieces*. Mainly, however, they are about a gay Jewish playwright who is writing a play about his family, and, if we can believe the



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actors in "Too Much in the Sun" (Bagden and Ellis again) who discuss the work they are supposed to be rehearsing, it is hardly a nostalgic picture of the old folks at home. The interrelated pieces are about the making of the play, a game with the audience because the work teases beneath the deconstruction of conventional theater and it makes a joke of the demands on the audience. The program runs almost three hours. At its best, *Pieces* suggests that, without his ambition and his *tsouris*, Greenspan might have been a natural for revue sketches. But, then, there is not much call for revue sketches these days except when they are transformed into performance-art pieces. GERALD WEALES

## MEDIA

# ERIC CLAPTON'S GENIUS

## A MENSCH WHO PLAYS THE BLUES

"Clapton is God." That was the graffito scrawled all over London in the late sixties. It is, for sure, one of the most famous graffiti in history, up there with "Kilroy was here" and "Bird Lives!" And, I guess, everything I'm about to say is a grudging agreement with that outrageous assessment.

Eric Clapton is a blues guitarist, if you've spent the last twenty years on Mars. He's a "blues guitarist" in the way caviar and Dom Perignon is a "snack." And he's one of the most fascinating and, certainly, loved figures in rock and roll, just because he fits none of the usually grungy paradigms we associate with that art. He is shy. In interview after interview, he seems permanently troubled about, uncertain of, his brilliant gifts. See him on stage sometime. He doesn't windmill his guitar, he doesn't do splits or feign masturbation or fall on his knees or spit at the audience. He stands still and looks at the frets while he lays down stunning line after stunning line, and the high visual drama of a Clapton concert is when he winces at a change he thinks he's missed—he usually hasn't—or smiles when it's all sounding good to him. He looks like Howdy Doody when he smiles.

I'm going to call him "Eric" from now on, okay? That's because my wife and I, who love his music almost as much as we love one another, refer to him that way around the house. But it's also because that's the way jazz fans refer to the really great players, by their first names. "Miles." "Dizzy." "Sonny." By me, Clapton *deserves* to be "Eric."

1991/92 has been Eric's year, in splendid and terrible ways. A big CD collection of his "best"—a choice I sure wouldn't want to have to make—has been issued. He was signed to do the score for the movie *Rush*, a potboiler about narcs who get hooked on dope. I read the novel and the only reason I'll see the movie is for the score—that's the *musical* score. A new generation of kids for whom the sixties are about as remote as Camelot are discovering the joy and pain of his music, and through that discovering the authentically, radiantly American art of the blues.


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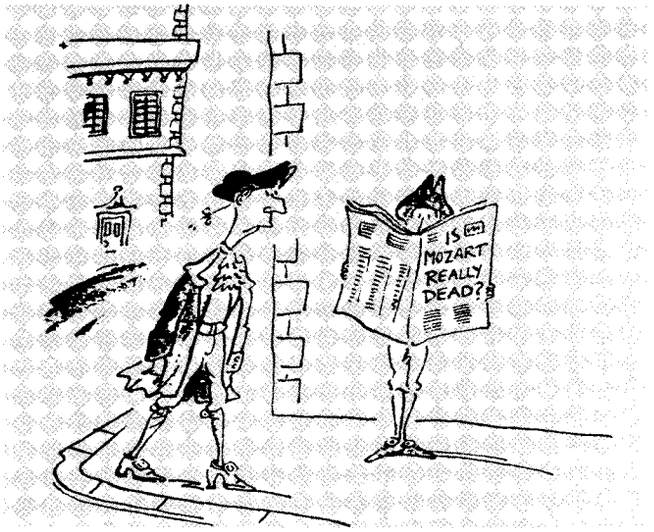


That's the black ink side of the ledger.

The red ink side is that a few months ago his boy, a toddler, fell out the open window of the fiftieth floor of his mother's apartment in New York, and died.

The red ink side cancels out everything else, and Eric has said so.

So how does a man—that's a *mensch*, which in Yiddish is a very serious word—deal with an absurd and obscene accident, a cosmic insult, like that?

What Eric Clapton does is, he plays the blues.

And maybe that's why I'm writing this. We all hear, and subscribe to, and in my case teach a lot of guff about how art cures and humanizes and consoles, and razza razza. But do most of us really believe that? You've got a toothache, your lover has just told you he/she has found somebody more "fulfilling"—they love using that word when leaving—and the first thing you do is read or write a *poem*? Come on.

But with Big Eric, the music really does seem to have that saving force, almost—and he, I think, would not quarrel with this—as if it were his avenue to—well, God. Listening to the man's music is listening to the man make himself, and if that's not part of religion then I don't know what the hell is.

He's one of those Brits, like John Lennon, Pete Townshend, and Mick Jagger, who discovered the blues in the late fifties when they were all in art school—which is where smart working-class kids in Britain who couldn't go to Oxford or Cambridge went—and found in the blues the perfect expression of their own feelings of disenfranchisement, of marginalization, and of anger against a system that didn't seem, really, to notice them at all. So Lennon became the Beatles and Townshend became the Who and Mick became the Rolling Stones and they made millions of bucks on their rage.

The difference with Big Eric is that he, more than any of them, took the message of the blues to heart. He has frequently testified to his obsession with the great and doomed bluesman Robert Johnson, and his testimony is almost always about the spirit, not the form, of the music. And that matters profoundly.

Because the blues—bred out of slavery, work-songs, the church, and general and unremitting despair of the quotidian—is above all a music of triumph, of coming through and *saying* the Worst That Could Happen, and of turning the awful into the transcendent, into the James Brown-Ray Charles raw-throat shout which is, we'd better face it folks, the breath of God.

And that's what Big Eric has always known. Somebody—I think it was Muddy Waters—once said, "Those English guys, you know, they all want to play the blues so bad, and that's how they play the blues: so bad."

Well, yeah. Rock and roll, for all its splendor, and there's a lot of that, has always had one big open secret, to wit that it's mainly a bunch of bourgeois white guys, American *and* English, trying to imitate black forms of expression. That's how Elvis himself was marketed back at the moment of the Big Bang itself.

Which is another reason why Big Eric is so—sorry, no other word fits—beautiful. Let me see if I can get this right. It's, you see, that he knows that the blues is not his music, but also knows that it is his music—and, maybe more than that, his fate and his vocation. And aren't those the same thing?

Listen to his playing on "White Room," when he was with the first of the "supergroups," Cream. No power chord, no razzle-dazzle, just exquisitely, excruciatingly planned and executed single-note lines, meditating on the secrets implicit in the song's changes: the Zen of the blues. This is a man of intense dedication and intelligence trying—trying so hard—to find out what there is in a tradition not his own that can sustain and nurture his imagination. Or listen, and then listen again, to his song, "Layla." It may be the greatest rock and roll song ever recorded. Really. He wrote it after the breakup of his affair with Patti Harrison, wife of George of the Beatles, and when he was slipping into a heroin addiction. And it's a song about loss and pain as strong as anything Mozart ever did, seven minutes of solid agony, repetitive, interminable, you ask yourself "won't this *ever* end?" and at the same time and miraculously so melodic, so lovely, so heartbreakingly gorgeous that, by the final note, you—okay, I—don't know whether your tears are for the loss that generated the damn thing or for the human gain that is the damn thing.

So Big Eric has spent thirty years trying to live the blues, which is also for him trying to be a good man. Back when every rocker was discovering some tantric guru, Big Eric—at the time he did "Layla," and right between his heroin days and his booze days—scandalized the *Rolling Stone* crowd by declaring he was a Christian.

Well, it makes sense. Because if the blues is a loser's triumphant music, Christianity is a bluesman's religion: one that says the losers and the crummy people are finally worthwhile and shining like the sun. As losers, man: if our flaws don't get us into the kingdom, then the kingdom is just another scam.

And there he is still, after a lifetime of grief, still making great music and still unsure of his own greatness. If "Art" is the magical mystical thing we tell ourselves it's supposed to be, then somebody should erect a monument to Big Eric as one of the very few real artists of this part of the century.

"Clapton is God"? Let me rewrite the graffito in a way that really counts: Clapton is *good*.

FRANK McCONNELL



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# LENTEN BOOKS

SUGGESTIONS FROM:
ROBERT P. IMBELLI, ANDREW M. GREELEY,
CAROL RITTNER, MARY LOU KOWNACKI,
REMBERT G. WEAKLAND,
MEINRAD CRAIGHEAD, ART WINTER,
ROBERT W. HOVDA,
ROSANNE HAGGERTY REDMOND

## Robert P. Imbelli

Our pre-Vatican II flirtation with Latin heralded Lent's arrival with the sobering, if scarcely deniable dictum: "*In medio vitae jam mortui sumus*—in the midst of life we already taste death." Undeniable, but, of course, daily denied (as Andre Dubus avers: "we are distracted, we run errands..."), unless monastic or domestic discipline (the two closer than we often surmise) or personal affliction compel our attention to its truth. Both discipline and affliction have driven Dubus to contend with death; and his recent book of essays, *Broken Vessels* (David B. Godine), serves as striking testimony to the encounter. It thus bears blessings to the company of believers, wayfarers in Lent, sustained by Easter hope.

David Toolan's splendid review in *Commonweal* (November 22, 1991) first alerted me to the book; and I hope this re-echoing will attract yet others to the dreadful wisdom the work embodies. There are no spectral abstractions in it; only sacramental substance. The title essay itself conveys with almost unbearable intensity and honesty the tragic, selfless accident that cost Dubus a leg and rendered him a cripple. And though many of the essays were written long before that terrible night in 1986, the climactic encounter with death and diminishment casts a searing darkness and light over all.

Throughout the book, death is not dissected at a distance, but wondrously wrestled with. The miraculous result is that life is not grudgingly measured out, but extravagantly celebrated, whether in the refusal of self-deception, the rage for justice, or the surrender to grace. Reading the essays, one can almost catch the strains of the Easter Sequence: "Death and life were joined in stupendous combat; life's standard-bearer dies, yet reigns victorious."

Many have lauded the sacramental sensibility so evident in Dubus's work. But here that sensibility is founded upon rock, its substance transubstantiated in Eucharist: the memorial of the Lord's death until he comes. One day at Mass, after accident and multiple operations and daily struggles merely to endure, Dubus directs this prayer to the Lord:

> I receive You in the Eucharist at daily Mass, and look at You on the cross, but mostly I watch the priest, the old deacon, a widower, who brings me the Eucharist; and the people who walk past me to receive; and I know they have all endured their own agony, and prevailed in their own way, though not alone but drawing their hope and strength from those they love, those who love them; and from You, in the sometimes tactile, sometimes incomprehensible, sometimes seemingly lethal way that You give.

Here lies Lent's Easter reversal: "In the midst of death, still we live. Alleluia!"

*The Reverend Robert P. Imbelli, a frequent* Commonweal *contributor, is director of the Institute of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry at Boston College.*

## Andrew M. Greeley

As befits a book by a poet, particularly an Irish poet, the title of Seamus Heaney's new collection *Seeing Things* (Random House) has two meanings. (A word means two thinks as Joyce wrote.) First of all it means *seeing* things, that is seeing not only the hard physical reality of things, but seeing what lurks behind them, their meaning, their mystery, their hints of something else. It also means seeing *things*, physical, material objects, the solid presences which lurk around our everyday life. A Lenten exposure to Heaney's extraordinary sight and insight should help one better to *see* and to see *things*.

Heaney's work is a classic example of what David Tracy calls the analogical imagination, the particularly and peculiarly Catholic propensity to see grace everywhere, to sense all of reality and all realities as signs of the transcendent. Heaney's vision is overwhelmingly Catholic and almost always implicitly so. All poets are sacrament-makers, even if they do not want to be. Heaney, however, is self-consciously a maker and a revealer of the sacramental, of the gracious in the ordinary. He is not an apologist, heaven save us, nor a convert-maker. Rather he sees the world through Catholic eyes; and, though he doesn't say so, one has very little doubt that he knows that his vision is Catholic. And Irish Catholic at that. Indeed, Seamus Heaney may well be the most Catholic writer since the aforementioned James Joyce.

And may be just possibly the beginning of a new tradition of Catholic humanism. And Irish Catholic at that.

*The Reverend Andrew M. Greeley is a professor of social science at the University of Chicago and author of the new Bishop Blackie Ryan mystery,* Happy Are the Merciful *(Warner Books).*

## Carol Rittner

Before Vatican II, stress was put on fasting and praying during Lent. The church still exhorts us to fast and pray, but these days, faced as we are with the decaying cities, ecological devastation, increasing economic inequality, shattered families, neighborhoods, and schools, we must couple fasting and prayer with our human responsibility for building a more humane society. Denying our very selves and taking up our cross is not separate from working to transform our society but is integral to the transformative process.

If you have time to read only one book this Lent, I recommend



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*The Good Society* by Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Anne Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton (Alfred A. Knopf). It is an antidote to the apathy, cynicism, and despair so many Americans feel over the decline and decay of our nation's institutions. The authors' goal is to enrich the quality of American life by reinvigorating the American people about what matters most: "learning how to live our lives, and with whom."

*The Good Society* is not an easy book to read, but it is an important book to read. While it is short on strategy, it is filled with insights, analysis, and encouragement to engage others in the conversation of democracy. Lent is a good time for us to reflect on "how to live our lives, and with whom." *The Good Society* reminds us that when people come together, when they pay attention to what is significant, power is generated that can transform even the most decayed institutions. We can begin to act when we interact. And Lent reminds us Christians that we are sealed with the sign of the cross, our power to transform the world.

*Carol Rittner, R.S.M., lives in Scranton, Pa., and is the co-editor (with John Roth) of* Memory Offended: The Auschwitz Convent Controversy *and the forthcoming* Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust.

## Mary Lou Kownacki

The forty days of Lent are earthquake time. But these days it's hard to find a "spiritual" book that sells dynamite, not No-Doz.

Are the catacombs really about wallowing in dysfunctional families, healing every bruise and boo-boo since the crib, burnout and balanced lifestyles, enneagrams and INFJ, ESTP, WXYZ?

Thank God for Stephen Mitchell. His latest book, *The Gospel According to Jesus: A New Translation and Guide to His Essential Teachings for Believers and Unbelievers* (HarperCollins) is excellent Lenten reading for those who prefer being pulled from preoccupation with self to the poetic and profound.

The introduction alone offers enough fresh and disturbing ideas to be worth the price of the book. When I was national coordinator of Pax Christi USA, we issued a contemporary litany on Mary, giving her some real but radical titles. The only title, however, that evoked angry phone calls and letters to the office was the invocation "Unwed Mother, pray for us." Well, that's a hint of what's in Mitchell's introduction.

The center of the book is a new translation from the Greek of the sayings of Jesus and a commentary on the same. By using the best of modern scholarship, Mitchell strips the gospel to its essence, omitting all passages that were added by the early church. As a result the "good news" is once again news. In the hands of this sculptor of words, the reflections on the text are masterpieces.

Actually, I recommend anything by Mitchell for Lenten reading. *The Enlightened Heart*, a collection of mystical poetry; his translations of the Tao and the Book of Job will wrestle you for a lifetime. Even his essay on the book of Lamentations in *Congregation* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich) is ideal Holy Week reading. "But grief, after all, like joy, comes to us as a passing guest," Mitchell writes. "We ought to treat it with courtesy, as Abraham treated the angels. Who knows what disguise our angels take."

Light the dynamite and duck.

*Mary Lou Kownacki, O.S.B., is executive director of the Alliance for International Monasticism.*

## Rembert G. Weakland

All four Evangelists make the events of the passion and death of Jesus Christ the centerpiece of their Gospels. These accounts—their vivid details, their pathos, their portrayal of the long-suffering Christ—have been central to us Christians throughout the centuries.

Unfortunately, the disposition of texts in the new Lectionary has eliminated the reading of all four accounts during Holy Week. Now one of the accounts is proclaimed on Sunday of that week, and John's account is sung on every Good Friday. Moreover, all the other sections of Scripture are broken up and read in smaller portions over a long period of time, so that preacher and listener can reflect on each detail and every aspect of the mystery. It is surprising that the Passion narrative is read in one sitting and never broken up.

Thus, during Lent I find it helpful to read all the accounts of the Passion and death in smaller doses and in a more prayerful and reflective way, what Benedictines call *lectio divina*, extended over the whole of Lent. As a help in such a meditation I find the four books by Donald Senior, C.P. most useful: *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew; The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark; The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke; The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of John* (Liturgical Press).

*The Most Reverend Rembert G. Weakland, O.S.B., is the archbishop of Milwaukee.*

## Meinrad Craighead

Having lived for years with the *lectio divina* discipline of the Benedictine monastic tradition, I search for (but rarely find) books which invite me to "taste and see" the working of the spirit in the author. Patricia Reis, the author of *Through the Goddess: A Woman's Way of Healing* (Continuum), is an artist and psychotherapist whose words do speak directly to my soul.

As an artist, I too, with Patricia Reis, have internalized the wealth of divine female images created by our prehistoric sisters that have, most recently, been presented to us in the archaeological work and books of Marija Gimbutas.

These ancient images confirm what any woman artist knows: that we are not empty vessels waiting to be filled by an outer, other, phallic energy, but, like the primordial self-conceiving goddess, the entire power and process of seeding, gestation, and birthing, the paradigm of all creative work, is wholly within our bodies.

The author tells the stories of women whom she has guided to wholeness, to healing diseased, wounded, or abused bodies and



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psyches. Her way is through *therapeia*, the act of "attending to," and its original association with worship. *Through the Goddess* is the journey back to the wisdom of the cosmic mother who, for over 20,000 years enlightened our religious imaginations, the sole divinity whom we worshiped, the subject of art and ritual. And it is a journey forward to the recovery of her healing wisdom, the knowledge of female wholeness, of self-conceiving and regeneration.

*Meinrad Craighead lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Her most recent book is* The Litany of the Great River *(Paulist).*

## Art Winter

All of us know what we believe happens at Mass. The Spirit gathers. God speaks. Christ intercedes with the Father and communes with us. In and through the ritual, God acts and we respond with praise and thanks. The Mass is ended and we go in peace.

True. But it's only part of the story. There's another liturgy in which God interacts with us. It's a liturgy that takes place in the world. Indeed, this liturgy is the primary liturgy. We spend all our lives participating in it, not just an hour a week. In fact, we work out our salvation through it.

I've heard rumors of this liturgy of the world. But nothing I've read has made it as clear and believable as Michael Skelley's *The Liturgy of the World: Karl Rahner's Theology of Worship* (Pueblo Books from Liturgical Press). It does so by spelling out Karl Rahner's theology of grace—that God is present and active in every nook and cranny of creation. In other words, the Spirit is present there; God speaks there; Christ intercedes and communes with us there: God acts and we respond there.

The liturgies are linked: the one in church symbolically expresses the one in the world. This closes the centuries-old split between the secular and the sacred that has plagued us. It means, for example, the liturgy of Lent and Easter is going on all the time in the world, not just in church during forty special days. Knowing this, our Lents can never be the same. Nor, for that matter, can our Sunday mornings. Perhaps even more important, neither can our Monday mornings.

*Art Winter is the editor of* Praying *magazine.*

## Robert W. Hovda

Lent's ancient character as a climactic season in the process of communal initiation is being rediscovered. Reading for Lent, then, must permit an appropriately brief preoccupation with church, faith community, body of Christ. Church is the focus of Lent and Easter while all the rest of the year is focused on the world as a whole, God's reign therein, mission—this last the proper overall focus of heirs of Judaism and disciples of Christ.

After the Bible (basic book of believers, font of liturgical tradition), the book whose message is most needed in initiatory processes—and has meant most to me in forty-three years of presbyterial ministry—is *A Theology of Liberation* by Gustavo Gutierrez (translated and edited by Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson, Orbis). I cherish it not merely as a *read*, but as a *vade mecum.*

This century's remarkable opening up of a museum liturgy to be the universally accessible "primary and indispensable source" for a church that had become too dependent on its official interpreters is the basis for its rescue of theology from academic and abstract confines, freeing that reflection to be as it once was: pastoral, benefiting from the insights and experience of all.

Like Gutierrez's book, initiation is about helping each other to engage seriously in the lifelong task of becoming free of idolatry to worship God alone. It is not a party line, but a call to dormant imaginations to create and bring together many party lines and interpretations in love toward consensus. This author-prophet persuades us that we cannot contribute if we are not free in relation to money and its omnipresent satellites, that the continuing pilgrim process is "breaking down our selfishness and the structures that support our selfishness." It is an immersion in God rather than a dipping of our toes in an isolated and protected puddle we have the chutzpah to call "faith."

*The Reverend Robert W. Hovda, recently deceased, was a long-time columnist for* Worship *magazine and a contributor to* Commonweal.

## Rosanne Haggerty Redmond

From the train carrying her to her death at Auschwitz, Etty Hillesum threw a postcard. "We left the camp singing," declared this remarkable and complicated woman, whose spiritual journey against the background of the Holocaust is revealed in *An Interrupted Life—The Diaries of Etty Hillesum, 1941-1943* (Pantheon). Published in this country in 1983, *An Interrupted Life* is an unforgettable account of a search for self-knowledge and an authentic spiritual identity, of doubt, clear-eyed courage, faith, altruistic love, and ultimately, of transcendence.

Etty Hillesum was a twenty-seven-year-old Jewish, somewhat Bohemian intellectual living in Nazi-occupied Amsterdam when she began her diary. She was a deeply intuitive, passionate person, and a marvelous writer. Etty's reflections rarely focus on the ominous political landscape. She is, rather, attempting to locate a source of meaning, a sense of purpose, and to integrate her intellectual, sensual, and spiritual selves. When the forced deportation of Amsterdam's Jews begins, Etty must test her newfound beliefs in God and the mystical unity of creation. She finds that she is spiritually prepared, even liberated to respond to desperate circumstances. She declines opportunities to escape Amsterdam, and embraces the fate of the Jewish people. To live out her conviction that "we should be willing to act as a balm for all wounds," Etty voluntarily goes to Westerbork, a holding camp for those on their way to Auschwitz.

*An Interrupted Life* is profound reading for any season, but is particularly suited for those Lenten moments when Etty's life and final remarks echo with glorious sustaining power.

*Rosanne Haggerty Redmond is director of the Common Ground Community, which operates and is renovating the Times Square Hotel for single room occupancy.* □



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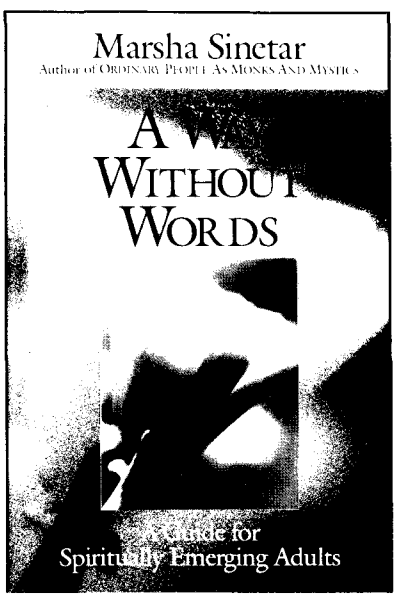
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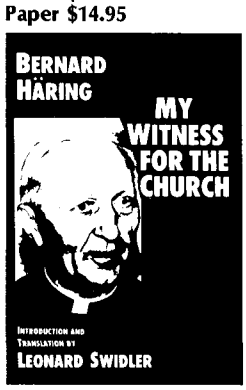


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# Was Newman a failure?

**THE GREAT DISSENT**
John Henry Newman and the Liberal Heresy
**Robert Pattison**
Oxford University Press, $29.95, 231 pp.

**Robert L. Spaeth**

Newman a failure? It is a shocking idea. John Henry Newman, the leader of the Oxford Movement, the inspiring convert to Catholicism, the author of landmark books such as *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* and *The Idea of a University*, a cardinal, and finally a prospective saint—a failure?

Yet this is the disturbing thesis argued in *The Great Dissent*, whose primary purpose, as its author Robert Pattison writes, is "to establish Newman's impeccable credentials as a failure." We can forget the usual claims for Newman's greatness, Pattison says; they are false and, in any case, mostly kept alive by partisans and promoters of his cause for canonization. We need to face the facts: "He failed in all his worldly and even intellectual objectives."

Anyone who has studied and been inspired by any of Newman's great books knows that Newman was no failure. Hence it is tempting to assert in advance that such an idea cannot be rationally supported, that it must be proposed out of some peculiar if not malicious desire to defame a great thinker. This temptation needs to be resisted, because the author of this book defends his thesis with impressive competence.

Pattison's argument depends crucially on viewing Newman's life as an unbroken whole, as a sustained campaign against an error so monstrous as to threaten all that is vital to mankind. This error Newman called "liberalism," a name for modernity, which Newman hated and struggled against—unsuccessfully. If Newman was indeed "the uncontaminated antagonist of everything modern," we need to know what he hated, what he meant by "liberalism." (That Newman gives contemporary Catholic "liberals" some of their best intellectual sustenance—see his essay, "On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine," for example—is irrelevant to this discussion.)

Newman defined liberalism in the *Apologia pro Vita Sua* as "the antidogmatic principle and its developments." Choosing similar words on another occasion, he said liberalism is "the doctrine that there is no positive truth in religion." Newman found this error, or heresy, pervasive in modern thought; hence he set himself in opposition to Western civilization itself.

While still an Anglican, Newman found liberalism embodied in Renn Dickson Hampden, whose books and sermons offered more than adequate targets. Hampden gave Oxford University's Bampton lectures in 1832, which Newman regarded with horror. Hampden's elevation to Oxford professor of moral philosophy in 1834 and to Regius professor of divinity in 1836 were accomplished over Newman's furious opposition. By then Newman had named Hampden *prodromos Antichristou* —forerunner of Antichrist. What in Hampden's ideas could deserve such opprobrium?

What Hampden saw to be the foundation of our belief in God may serve as a representative example. His faith rested on trust in Scripture. We know about the Trinity, he said, "because we read the fact in the pages of Scripture." But to know anything about God directly would mean human beings can know something beyond nature and revelation, and this Hampden denied.

Hampden opposed scholasticism, any absolutism; in Pattison's words, he "insisted that all dogmas, creeds, and doctrines are as tentative and defective as the language in which they are stated." Thus Hampden favored tolerance, humanism, relativism. His promotion to bishop in 1847 validated Newman's charge that liberalism had become powerful in the church itself.

Newman's archenemy Hampden did not invent liberalism, nor did he take it as far as others. The roots of the modern heresy Newman found in the Arian heresy of the fourth century. The Arians' belief that "God must pre-exist the Son" rested on their conviction that God himself is unknowable,

John Fandel
**Pentecost**

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"invisible to all ... invisible to the Son himself." Here was protoliberalism. And although the Council of Nicaea condemned Arianism, its principles lived on to find new life in the Reformation and in nineteenth-century England.

Pattison summarizes the propositions Newman would substitute for the errors of liberalism: "the objective existence of truth, the possibility of its dogmatic exposition, and the empirical demonstration of both from the experiences of the mind." To protect dogma, an authoritative institution is necessary; by 1845 Newman had found that authority in the Roman Catholic church. Although resigned to the secular liberalism of the society he lived in, Newman would have preferred a social order that would protect the true church: "no one can dislike the democratic principle more than I do," he wrote in 1874.

Newman was fighting a losing battle. Even in his own time, liberalism had won. In ours, there are only liberals, including those who prefer the name conservative. Pattison makes brief reference to modern conservatives such as Friedrich Hayek, T.S. Eliot, Alasdair MacIntyre, William F. Buckley, Jr.—and concludes that Newman would find the rot of liberalism in all of them.

If Newman failed so completely to stem the tide of modernism, why pay any attention to him any more? On this question Pattison, who is professor of English at Southampton College of Long Island University, ends his brilliant study—but rather weakly. "The great virtue of Newman's critique of liberalism," Pattison writes, "is that it exists at all." He apparently means liberalism needs a critique, and Newman's thought provides one. Indeed, Newman gives "one consistent view of the world opposed to liberalism root and branch, sharing none of its premises and despising all of its works."

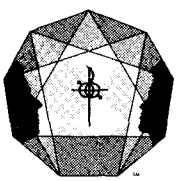
*The Great Dissent*, in toto, suggests that Newman's opposition to liberalism is in fact what makes Newman Newman. But to accede to this understanding is to surrender to a form of historicism, a denial that Newman's literary accomplishments can outreach their original intentions, that Newman is to be evaluated only for successes and failures in his own time. This approach radically undervalues Newman, many of whose ideas have again and again shown their power beyond Newman's life and times.

Consider, for instance, the *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. Pattison fits it into Newman's personal journey, pointing out that the *Essay* "distinguished absolutely between orthodox Roman and heretical Anglican doctrine" and thus moved Newman toward his conversion to Catholicism. Nothing wrong here. But the *Essay* can be profitably read without knowing what role it played in

Newman's life; it is so full of insights into doctrine itself, whether stated in the nineteenth or the twentieth century, that the question of the "success" of this book—and hence, in part, of Newman—ought not to be submerged in Pattison's analysis of Newman's lifelong struggle against liberalism. Newman's ideas on development of doctrine are important, period, irrespective of their historical origins.

Another example of an influential Newman work is *The Idea of a University*. Pattison admits it "contains a grand and enduring vision of education." But once again he reduces a great achievement to an event in Newman's life; the "elevated thoughts" in the *Idea*, Pattison claims, "do not square with Newman's own most basic beliefs." Apparently because Newman's educational ideas were not woven into the fabric of his life's quest, they must be of lesser worth. Pattison is even tempted to classify the *Idea* as irony, Newman "revenging himself upon the secular snobbery of his Oxford contemporaries." Neither understanding of *The Idea of a University* comes anywhere near appreciating that book for its real value—and that value, apart from the occasion that gave it birth, has proved itself far beyond its time and place. *The Idea of a University* is evidence of Newman's success, not of his failure.

*The Great Dissent* gives us Newman whole, but the parts—the books and essays—are greater than the whole, of more lasting significance. □

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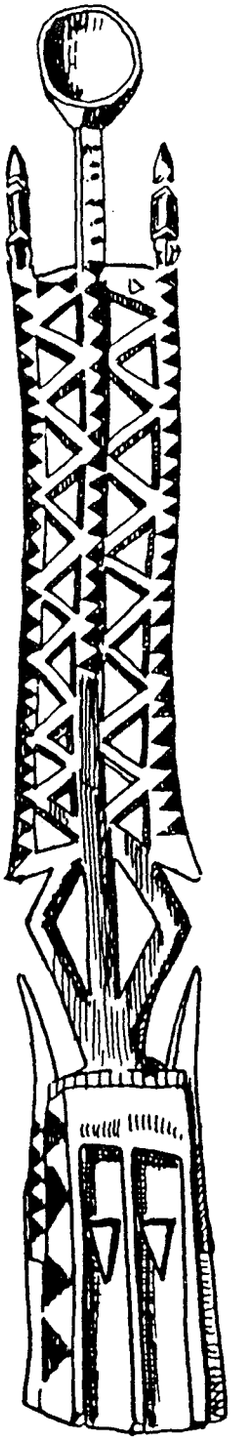

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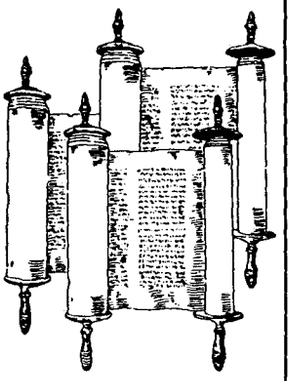

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# MORE THAN A FEMINIST

**THE MORAL VISION OF DOROTHY DAY**
A Feminist Perspective
**June E. O'Connor**
Crossroad, $16.95, 123 pp.

**David Scott**

At first blush, Dorothy Day wouldn't seem to make much of a feminist. "Women's liberation," she told an interviewer in 1975, "...is too self-centered. It's not geared to the poor but to articulate middle-class women with time on their hands, the ones who have the least to complain about."

Indeed, there is much in Day's legacy that "conforms to a conventional patriarchal outlook," according to June O'Connor's important new study, *The Moral Vision of Dorothy Day: A Feminist Perspective*. Day, she contends, accepted "traditional, conventional roles assigned to men and women," and her moral thinking was at times clouded by "sexist thought patterns she inherited and sustained." Nevertheless, O'Connor recognizes "a hidden feminist dimension" in the life and writing of the co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement.

Approaching Dorothy Day with feminist themes and questions, O'Connor, who teaches religious studies at the University of California, Riverside, opens up new avenues for appreciating Day's thought. O'Connor argues persuasively that more than a decade after her death, Day has something to contribute to contemporary moral discourse, both in and out of feminist circles.

Through O'Connor's lens, Day's feminist appeal is readily seen. Here is a single, working mother, a grandmother, who edited an influential journal of opinion and pioneered a historic American movement for social and religious change. She knew personally the indignities of sexism, having suffered at the hands of machismo, including being pressured into an abortion by a man she loved.

And, in O'Connor's assessment, Day's writings resonate with some staple feminist themes. She articulates a "prominent feminist hope," namely, that women can recover an "intimate connection between the personal and the political, the spiritual and the material, the religious and the social-historical features of human experience." With many feminists, Day shared a "fundamental and integral vision of justice" which saw the interplay and connection between the exploitation of women, the poor, racial and ethnic minorities, and the natural world.

Day's ethic is characterized by an intuitive solidarity and identification with the sufferings of the poor and the marginalized: "Part of Day's distinctive contribution to moral reflection and moral living seems to lie in her capacity to see others in herself and herself in others."

Despite these concordances, O'Connor notes areas where Day would make feminists wary. Day's "critical views" on sex outside of marriage and on abortion wouldn't sit well with many. Most would be annoyed that Day "accepted without question" many "patriarchal features" of her religion and the "manifest sexism" of Christian institutions.

O'Connor provides a good introduction for feminists unfamiliar with Day and for followers of Day who might have missed this feminist perspective. Still, one puts O'Connor's book down disappointed, wishing she had really immersed herself in Day's life and writings to offer a fuller, more accurate portrait of Day as an American woman and Christian moralist.

Why isn't O'Connor more interested in looking at the roots of Day's moral vision and self-identity in her fractured home life and in the ferment of pre-World War I Greenwich Village? Likewise, she is too quick in passing over the influence of the early women's peace movement on Day's later ideas on gender and pacifism. Nor does O'Connor make more than a passing connection between Day's bitter taste of the 1920s sexual revolution and her later positions on gender and sexual politics.

The book is most deficient in discussing Day's religious beliefs and their influence on her moral vision. For instance, O'Connor claims that Day "accepted without question" patriarchal "images of God (as Father, King and Judge)." But Day almost never referred to God as judge or king, preferring the images of the forgiving, merciful father in the prodigal son parable, and the unjudging, all-loving husband in the Book of Hosea.

As she grew older, Day's writings on God and Christ became increasingly mystical and erotic, as she came more deeply to know God as a spouse and lover. "I believe in a personal God," she wrote in 1966. "And intimate, oh, how closely intimate we may desire to be." In *Therese* (1961), she points out the "sexual element"

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in Therese of Lisieux's love of God. With Therese, St. John of the Cross, and Teresa of Avila, Day's love of God was a mysterious, sexual embrace—which she could only compare to the erotic courtship and union of man and woman.

Neither patriarch nor judge, Dorothy Day's personal God was an intimate partner, with whom she lived in mutual love. As she wrote in *On Pilgrimage* (1948): "The love of God and man becomes the love of equals as the love of the bride and the bridegroom is the love of equals, and not the love of the sheep for the shepherd, or the servant for the master, or the child for the parent."

O'Connor suggests that the key to Day's moral vision lies in her answer to the question: "What kind of person do I want to become?" But by assuming that Day merely rehearsed "patriarchal" beliefs, O'Connor misses the chance to show how Day's self-awareness blossomed into a mystical desire—for intimacy, love, communion.

One wonders, too, how a feminist study could ignore Day's attraction to female saints like Therese and mystics like Julian of Norwich. Nor does O'Connor mention Day's great devotion to Mary, the mother of Christ. Day was once audacious enough to suggest to Betty Friedan and other feminists that Mary was the model of a truly "liberated" woman. Day's prayers and meditation on Mary should have been important to O'Connor's inquiry, as they reveal a great deal about Day's hopes as a woman and a disciple of Christ.

As in her writings about God, the images of parent and lover appear: "Wife of God, Mother of God—a profound mystery," she pondered in a 1954 column. For her, Mary was at the center of the mystery of the Incarnation. Without her, there was no Christ and no church: "He shared our human nature because she consented with her *fiat* that he should. God made subject to man—an inconceivable humility." Here again, God is shown as a humble suitor—infinitely tender, respectful of Mary's dignity and freedom.

O'Connor makes a big mistake in taking Day at her word that, as a woman, she couldn't "understand theological subtleties." It prevents her from seeing Day clearly: as a woman using all the resources of her life and faith—her gender and social location, prayer and grace, Scripture and church teaching—to reflect on her discipleship among the exploited and oppressed struggling to be free.

Day was not a woman parroting patriarchal expectations, but a believer talking of the possibility of God in a world filled with unjust cruelty and suffering. This is a woman seeking salvation, liberation, transcendence. She finds it by entering into the sufferings of the poor, a pilgrimage that she described as the "downward path to salvation," a meeting in the depths with the risen, still suffering, Christ.

O'Connor devotes scant attention to the mystical and redemptive dimensions of Day's love of the poor. She claims that Day used the Catholic dogma of Christ's "mystical body" as a "metaphor...to advance her work." But actually that dogma helped Day to understand and express her powerful, rousing encounter with Christ in the poor. "How do we know we believe?" she asked in a 1964 meditation on Mary Magdalene's discovery of the empty tomb. "Because we have seen his hands and his


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feet in the poor around us...in the unutterably poor who are going through their long-continuing crucifixion."

The radical's sojourn for justice and the mystic's pilgrimage for self-knowledge and union with God come together in Dorothy Day's mystical and redemptive love. "A mystic may be called a man in love with God," she wrote in *From Union Square to Rome* (1938). "Not one who loves God, but who is *in love with God*. And this mystical love, which is an exalted emotion, leads one to love the things of Christ. His footsteps are sacred."

To follow in Christ's footsteps, for Day means to be another Mary—to accept God's call and to bear his love, to bring Christ into the world. Mary "did not wait until Christ had been brought forth before she set out as an apostle," Day observed in 1954. Day's feminist moral vision flows from the same fount as Mary's *Magnificat*, that canticle of thanksgiving, deliverance, and hope which became for Day a "revolutionary anthem."

June O'Connor has opened a long overdue dialogue between Dorothy Day and contemporary morals and theology. The task now is to follow the subterranean currents that connect Day to the mystics of the church and the long stream of women and men who have struggled to liberate this country from slavery, social injustice, and war. □

# GREAT REVIVALISTS

**THE EVANGELIST OF DESIRE**
John Wesley and the Methodists
**Henry Abelove**
Stanford University Press, $25, 136 pp.

**THE DIVINE DRAMATIST**
George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism
**Harry S. Stout**
Eerdmans, $14.95, 301 pp.

**JOHN WESLEY'S SERMONS**
An Anthology
**Edited by Albert C. Outler & Richard P. Heitzenrater**
Abingdon Press, $49.95, 496 pp.

**Arthur J. Moore**

Last year was the bicentenary of the death of John Wesley. Since 1791, over three hundred studies of the man and his religious movement have appeared. Among other charges, he has been hailed and damned for having prevented an English version of the French Revolution. Even though the Methodism he began in England is declining in numbers, its influence is still strong. Enough so that in the 1983 British general election, the leaders of both the Conservative party (Margaret Thatcher) and the Labor party (Michael Foot) came out of strong, albeit dissimilar, Methodist family backgrounds. Still, aside from hagiography, the man and his impact remain complicated enough that one of his recent biographers titled his work, *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*.

Now Henry Abelove, a professor at Wesleyan University, has tried a new tack. Dissatisfied with what he calls the "old story" that Wesley was a master organizer who preached a simple message, he has approached the subject equipped with a Freudian theory about group psychology embellished with insights from Lacan and glosses on sexuality from Foucault. It is his contention that Wesley never was a good organizer and that his message was essentially the same as others, most notably George Whitefield, in the evangelical revival of the eighteenth century. What made the difference in Wesley's case was the deference and love that he brought forth in his largely plebeian followers, combined with the fact that they did not accept those parts of his message that did not appeal to them, such as celibacy. He elicited deference by skillful use of the symbols of being a gentleman—his clerical garb and grooming, his house in London, and the coach he used for traveling in later life—and by surrounding himself with lay helpers of a lower social standing. The love was brought forth by contrasting that rank with his approach to the poor—mingling with them, staying in their houses, and offering them medical treatment. (It is worth noting that this latter approach is similar to the portrait of Jesus drawn by John Dominic Crossan in his new book, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Peasant* [Harper-San Francisco] even though the class and cultural differences are profound. Taking the poor seriously always seems to work.)

That Wesley's close associates were aware of the class-based nature of his appeal is shown, Abelove believes, by the way Wesley's brother Charles and Whitefield intervened to prevent his marriage to Grace Murray, a widow who looked after him and was thus, in effect, a servant. Such a misalliance would have destroyed Wesley's standing in the eyes of his followers.

This is a thesis book and not a biography but it is immediately apparent that Abelove is highly selective in his use of evidence. All the other evangelists of the time are summarily dismissed as having no real impact or, in Whitefield's case, of having died young. Doctrine and church polity receive short shrift—the whole purpose of Wesley's confusing teachings on Christian perfection, which caused his break with Whitefield and the other Calvinists, was, in Abelove's view, to make him "unique, irreplaceable" to his followers. Similarly, his vision of an order of lay preachers within the Church of England was to insure that he could have no successor. Within the Methodist movement itself, Charles Wesley appears only tangentially in these pages.

Even class differences, the heart of this approach, are treated only perfunctorily. The Wesley brothers hardly came from an aristocratic milieu. While not so poor as Whitefield, who attended Oxford as a "servitor" (basically a servant), these sons of a poor country parson would scarcely seem to qualify as upper-class icons.

Similarly, in his treatment of Wesley's impact on his followers, Abelove carefully selects his evidence to make his point. Wesley did advocate celibacy, but so did Whitefield and other evangelists, and with



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no more success. Wesley's trouble with women is legendary and his eventual marriage was hardly a happy one, but Whitefield's married life was not a great model either. Oddly, Abelove never mentions Wesley's youthful and disastrous dealings with Sophie Hopkey in Georgia. The assertion that early Methodism may have encouraged women to practice birth control by refusing sex to their husbands—also inadvertently encouraging same-sex attachments—is based on skimpy evidence, indeed. The very real role that early Methodism played in giving women leadership roles and freedom remarkable for its time is not given extended treatment. Wesley's social philosophy and teaching about money is barely mentioned. In short, this is a book whose thesis is more intriguing than proven.

By contrast, a book that is a biography and also has a thesis is Harry S. Stout's life of George Whitefield. Its title, *The Divine Dramatist*, illustrates Stout's belief that Whitefield's spectacular success as an evangelist came from his use of theatrical effects in his preaching and made him the precursor of modern-day evangelists. This Stout effectively links to the growing market economy in which the preacher competed with the open-air vendors and hawkers and in which religion was increasingly treated as a commodity. Although Whitefield's Calvinism led to his break with Wesley (which was later repaired in personal terms), a bad experience in Scotland taught him to avoid denominational labels. Like Wesley, he remained an Anglican clergyman until his death, but he taunted the hierarchy to enhance his own ministry in a way that Wesley, who was a staunch Tory, never did. Also, much of Whitefield's career was in America. Ironically, he was first encouraged to come here by Charles and John Wesley, whose experiences in Georgia were not pleasant (John's was near catastrophic), and they never returned while Whitefield went from strength to strength. Stout dwells at length on the unlikely friendship between Whitefield and Benjamin Franklin and speculates that, had he lived, Whitefield would have supported the colonies in the American Revolution. This is an engaging look at a man whose influence is still felt.

Whitefield's sermons, most of which did not survive, were more theatrical scenarios than those of Wesley, who rewrote his for publication and the edification of his followers. Wesley's complete (and prodigious) works are being published in a new edition, but anyone who wants a good, solid start might try an anthology of fifty sermons selected by the late Albert Outler just before his death and edited by Richard P.

## REVIEWERS

ROBERT L. SPAETH *is professor of liberal studies and codirector of the Christian Humanism project at St. John's University, Collegeville, Minn.*

DAVID SCOTT *is the assistant editor of the* Evangelist *in Albany, New York.*

ARTHUR J. MOORE *was formerly editorial director of the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist church.*

MARK PATRICK HEDERMAN *is a visiting professor from Ireland at Boston University where he teaches English and Irish literature in the Irish Studies program.*


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Heitzenrater, himself a Wesley biographer and scholar. The sermons are chronologically arranged and the early Oxford sermons seem very stiff indeed, but the whole volume and Heitzenrater's introductions make fascinating reading. You may even begin to understand what was meant by Christian Perfection. □

# MORE THAN A JOKER

**JOCOSERIOUS JOYCE**
The Fate of Folly in Ulysses
**Robert H. Bell**
Cornell University Press, $24.95, 233 pp.

**Mark Patrick Hederman**

There is a story told at nearly every Joycean occasion in Dublin: Tourists trying to establish the exact location of Leopold Bloom's house on Eccles Street are met by a local street vendor who tells them: "No, it wasn't that house, it was the one down the road. It's Mr. Leopold Bloom's house you're lookin' for. Sure me mother knew him well. She was always in and out of that house as a kid." And the seminar collapses in knowing laughter. This book tells a similar story, not about the location of the house but the location of the character of Leopold Bloom himself, and the joke is on every person who has read the book "seriously" since its publication.

Professor Bell, once a columnist for *Commonweal*, maintains that there is no meaningful purpose to this work other than that of humiliating and ridiculing anyone searching for such a meaning. Joyce, as author, is hiding behind the text doubled up with laughter at the hilarious efforts of would-be disciples to scrape some message from it. The hungry sheep look up and are tickled to death. Even such famous critics as Harold Bloom are caught describing his namesake Leopold as "the most lovable person in Western fiction," while Joycean critics of more recent vintage dissolve with laughter because, as in the story of the emperor's new clothes, the truth of the matter is there was no Bloom there at all.

The author would have us relish such hoaxes played by the "Irish clown," the "great joker at the universe." He sees Joyce as a "fabulous mountebank" who invented a game for readers called Eureka! which can be played on the monopoly board of *Ulysses* by any number of readers for any number of centuries. The game is to "discover a minute hint or network of connections revealing the novel's ultimate meaning." "When *Ulysses* isn't fooling us, it is likely to be setting us up.... Joyce remains adamantly neutral, content to let his characters and readers struggle to impose theories and interpretations upon his creation; he is only paring his fingernails while we are busily, foolishly misreading signs and contriving meanings." Bell's view is that Joyce wrote a celebration of "folly" in the tradition of Cervantes, Rabelais, Sterne, Swift, etc., that the medium is farce which "merrily defies logic, common sense, decency, probability, and propriety," and "with its comic preference for flux instead of form, folly instead of logic, it...punctures certainties, mocks identity, and plays havoc." Bell sees this festival of fools as the last word in Joycean criticism and regards readers who look for a traditional narrative, characters with continuous homogeneous identities, or some thematic significant purpose in the novel as victims of the Joycean hoax or predatory egotists foisting personal obsessions onto an inimical and refractory screen, ingeniously designed to trap such foolishness. Real readers have been cautioned or humiliated to the point of disintegrating laughter.

This book is cogently argued, scrupulously annotated, and written in a vigorously readable style. As well as its own impressive argument it gives a panoramic overview of Joycean scholarship in the last decade. I would agree with the attempt to dissociate the Stephen of *Ulysses* from the hero of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Joyce's detailed and definitive undermining of the traditional notions about identity of character, the relationship between author and text, reader and author, reader and text is also manifestly true. But I cannot agree with the rehabilitation of Buck Mulligan as the impetus, spirit, and all-pervading inscape of the novel. Because Bell sees *Ulysses* as a hoax, he describes it as a festival "mocking authority and celebrating folly" and envisages the whole Joycean project in "the spirit of Mercurial Malachi, that enigmatic, potent blend of malice, wit, acumen, and horseplay."

I accept that *Ulysses* is a hoax, a Trojan horse in the citadel of the novel. It is described in *Finnegans Wake* as Joyce's attempt to "utter an epical forged cheque on the public for his own private use." I disagree with Robert Bell about the "private use" for which such work was undertaken. I tend to agree with Harriet Shaw Weaver who wrote to Joyce: "You are very good for the soul, I think, medicinal, you are so unflattering to our human nature. So, though you are neither priest nor doctor of medicine, I think you have something of both—the Reverend James Joyce, S.J., M.D." I also sympathize with Richard Ellmann's perception of Joyce as an explorer for humankind with whom we are still trying to catch up.

In terms of the title of this book, *Jocoserious Joyce*, I am grateful to Bell for his brilliant elaboration of the first two syllables and the first half of Joyce's "oxymoronic vision," but I would hope for more openness toward the second half of both. Joyce's *Ulysses* is not the Piltdown Man. For those who do not remember, this was the name given to remains, brought to scientific notice in 1912, which had been artificially treated to simulate a primitive form of man. The forgery was sufficiently convincing to generate scholarly attention for over forty years. I don't happen to be one of those who regard such a prank as hilariously amusing. If I am to take Professor Bell's analysis of *Ulysses* to what appear to be his ultimate conclusions, I get the impression that he does see analogies in such cases and does regard such a hoax, in the case of this novel at least, as hugely funny. If this were all, I think I would prefer to watch *The Three Stooges* than wade through *Ulysses* for my "seriocomic" laughs. □



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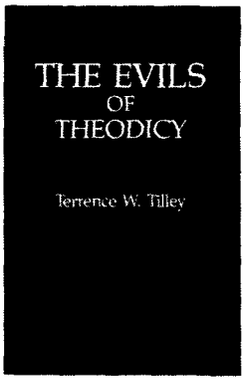
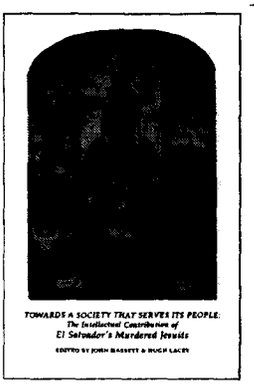
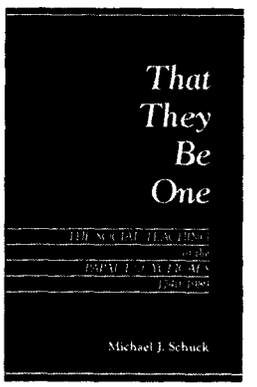
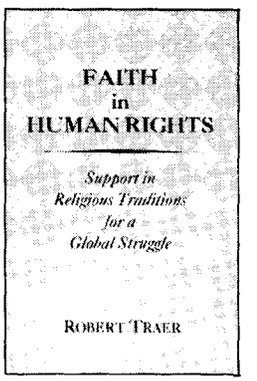
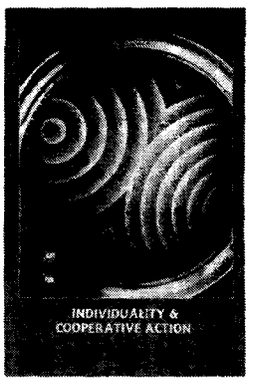
—*Gaudium et Spes*

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# The early days

Lawrence S. Cunningham

Rather like a fashion photographer who "shoots" a model from many angles and with many frames in order to capture one subject, Kingsbury looks at the Gospel of Luke from the multiple perspectives which make up the subtitles of the book. There is in Luke, to put it in other words, a story of Jesus, a story of the authorities with whom he was in conflict, and, finally, the story of the disciples who were the followers/believers who sustain the story as they move from naive credulity to a mature faith in the Risen One. Kingsbury takes seriously Luke's comment in the prologue to his Gospel (1:1-4) that his is a "narrative" and, following on that, "an orderly account." *Conflict in Luke* follows the narrative but from the three quite distinct angles noted above. This, then, is an exercise in narrative criticism similar to one that Kingsbury utilized in an earlier book on the Gospel of Mark.

**Conflict in Luke: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples,** *by Jack Dean Kingsbury, Fortress, $10.95, 180 pp.*

For the nonprofessional student of Scripture this book is not only useful for its careful and sympathetic reading of the text but for the clarity and jargon-free character of its prose. Its careful indices of scriptural citations and the annotated bibliography of Lucan scholarship makes it a "user friendly" volume. Kingsbury's brief work has none of the exegetical depth of, say, Fitzmyer's massive Anchor Bible commentary (curiously missing from Kingsbury's bibliography) but it reflects long meditation on the text and a sensitivity to theological concerns; a sensitivity which would recommend it to preachers and teachers.

Lieu and Murphy-O'Connor's volumes are part of a Cambridge University Press series under the rubric *New Testament Theology*. The general editor (James Dunn of the University of Durham in England) explains the intention of the series as an attempt to steer a course between massive commentaries studded with philological, exegetical, archaeological, and historical analysis, and popular "introductions" which have neither the space nor the inclination to pursue, in any systematic manner, the theology embedded in particular books of Scripture. The series, Dunn writes, is "directed at those who already have one or two years of full-time New Testament and theological study behind them."

Lieu's book on the Johannine epistles must settle, in a very brief space, a plethora of vexatious questions (e.g., the genre of I John; its relationship to the Gospel of John; connections of II and III John to Pauline theology; the character of the Johannine school[s], etc.). She sees I John as affirming the full humanity of Jesus against those who would so divinize him as to forget that humanity. But Lieu is not convinced that this message is a corrective to a too docetic reading of the Gospel of John. She further affirms that all three epistles wrestle with an issue which is with us even today, to wit, the need to link our common faith with the tradition of witnesses who, from the beginning, affirmed Jesus as Christ while, at the same time, not turning that witness into sterile repetition of formulae. And further: that witness and/or affirmation of faith is doubly sterile if it does not manifest itself in behavior that turns to God and neighbor in love; to do otherwise, John says pungently, is a lie.

**The Theology of the Johannine Epistles,** *by Judith Lieu, Cambridge University Press, $29.95, 130 pp.*

**The Theology of the Second Letter to the Corinthians,** *by Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, O.P., Cambridge University Press, $29.95, 166 pp.*

Murphy-O'Connor's contribution to this series on II Corinthians is a model of clarity and good sense. He outlines, in economic strokes, the contemporary setting of the epistle (or, more accurately, epistles, since chapters 1-9 were probably written independently of 10-13 and only later combined into a single whole) which had to do with divisions in the Corinthian church and Paul's prickly relations with the church. No matter how specific the Corinthian problems may have been, the issues which Paul treats are valid across the centuries: the problem of suffering; the shape of Christian ministry (contemporary discussions look, naturally enough, to the origins of our faith to see our present crises in the light of the gospel); and the significance of Jesus as we attempt to balance his his-

LAWRENCE S. CUNNINGHAM *chairs the Department of Theology at the University of Notre Dame.*



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toricity with the claims made about him and his salvific activity.

In sum: these two volumes, representative of the series as a whole, derive from the scholarly labors of very able commentators who provide us with a close reading of the text (I had to read these works with Bible in hand) and a sensitivity to the present needs of the believing community who hear these texts as inspired. They are very useful volumes produced in the best tradition of British scholarship: lucidly written and argued without any claims the text can not bear. Individual readers might find the entire series a bit of an expense, but the collected volumes belong on every reference shelf.

**The Religious World of Jesus: An Introduction to Second Temple Judaism,** *by Frederick J. Murphy, Abingdon, $21.95, 406 pp.*

Murphy, unhappy with courses on the Old Testament and New Testament in college curricula, designed an alternative approach which focused on the history of Israel from the period of the founding of the Second Temple down through its destruction at the hands of the Romans in A.D. 70. His book is a direct outcome of this approach. Murphy does not restrict himself to the canonical Scriptures but considers, in historical sequence, the vast corpus of extracanonical literature from the time period he considers. The merit of this approach is to place Jesus in the context of the Judaism from which he came and to contextualize the New Testament writings (e.g., about the Scribes, Pharisees, etc.). His book ends, with this panoramic picture of Judaism as background, by a presentation of Jesus as interpreted in a Jewish context: Jesus as Teacher of the Torah (Matthew); as High Priest (in the Epistle to the Hebrews); and as Eschatological Warrior (Book of Revelations).

Who might profit from this work? Certainly, those who would like a larger context within which to study the Bible in general and the New Testament in particular. Whether it should function as an undergraduate textbook depends crucially on a more philosophical question. Murphy consciously breaks out of the boundaries of the received canon of Sacred Scripture and, more to the point, he enlists various methodologies (historical, literary, anthropological, sociological, etc.) in his work. Conspicuously, however, he omits theology. Nor does he seem overly interested in the fact that the canonical Scriptures are a sacred text within a religious community.

Now the question occurs: what do we want students to take away from a course "on the Bible"? If our desire is only historical knowledge, then this is the approach. However, if our desire (it is my desire) is to have students reflect intelligently on the privileged writings of the Christian tradition, then this work functions better as background reading.

Do we really want to encourage students to plow through nearly five pages on the


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Assumption of Moses when the Beatitudes of Jesus gets thirteen lines and the Lord's Prayer twenty? This imbalance can be seen by a simple glance at the cover. The title reads *The Religious World of JESUS* (with JESUS in a different bold color). Jesus, however, does not make an entrance until chapter 11, then only to reappear in the final chapter. Professor Murphy can certainly make his case on methodological grounds (it has been made for years by the regnant wisdom in certain quarters of biblical studies) but, on this point, I rather like Gregory the Great's observation, cited by St. Thomas in the first question of the *Summa*, that while Scripture narrates deeds it also brings forth mystery (*dum gestum narrat, mysterium prodit*). Murphy is useful on the *gestus* but the *mysterium* is nowhere to be found and it is the latter rather than the former that most students, in my experience, seek.

Hill's book also had its beginnings in the classroom. It is an attempt to provide a panoramic view of Christology that does justice both to the researches of scriptural scholarship and the concerns of contemporary theology. After a traditional account of the New Testament background and discussions about the historical Jesus, Hill has separate chapters depicting Jesus from a number of diverse angles. In what sense can he be called a prophet? A miracle worker? What was his relation to women? to the concerns of the earth? What lies behind our affirmation that he was born at Bethlehem or crucified or raised from the dead? Finally, how did a "doctrine" arise about Christ and in what sense is he to be called on as savior?

**Jesus the Christ: Contemporary Perspectives,** *by Brennan Hill, Twenty-Third Publications, $14.95, 352 pp.*

Hill's work is an addition to a similar kind of book that has been produced with some regularity over the past few decades by scholars like Jaroslav Pelikan, Sean Freyne, William Thompson, Dermot Lane, Robert Krieg, Gerard Sloyan, and others. Each has its own peculiar angle of vision even though each also covers some familiar ground. Hill's volume has its own particular merits: clear writing, nice pedagogical aids like bibliographies and discussion questions, and a concern for contemporary issues. For that reason it is a welcome addition to Christological literature in that it provides teachers another reliable option when telling the story ever ancient and ever new.

In describing the genesis of his work, the Reverend Daley gives us a fair indication of what the finished product would look like. Asked to contribute a survey of patristic eschatology for a multivolumed German history of dogma, Daley decided to expand his contribution into an English history of the subject. Hence, the use of "handbook" in his subtitle. This book reads like the extremely long encyclopedia article it is.

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Given its origin and genre, I suspect that this is a work to which readers will turn for reference rather than reading it through. Daley examines each patristic writer in turn—he ends his survey with Pope Gregory the Great, i.e., at the very beginning of the seventh century—to see what they had to say about the "Last Things." He casts his net wide enough to include not only Greek and Latin writers but those who come out of the Coptic, Syriac, and Armenian tradition as well. His focus is tied to the elucidation of surviving texts with little time spent on social history.

**The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology,** *by Brian E. Daley, S.J., Cambridge University Press, $54.95, 300 pp.*

If one does read the book through, what becomes patently clear is that there were problems enough for the early church to ponder as they tried to make sense of the scriptural data: What was the nature of heavenly life? Were sinners damned forever or was there, as some Fathers thought, a comprehensive salvation for all? What is the relationship of death and human fate in relation to the Final Judgment envisioned by the Scriptures? Daley rightly notes that there were some watershed moments in the history of eschatology. One was the Origenistic concept of the final summing up of all things in Christ with its hope of universal salvation. Another was the absolutely pivotal distinction of Augustine between time and eternity (the later being not a long time but "no time"), which solved a lot of problems about the condition of souls after judgment. If the damned, for instance, live in "no time" there was no need to postulate a "misericordism" by which for certain periods their pains were mitigated (e.g., on Easter Sunday as one of the Fathers suggested!).

Daley's book reflects enormous reading and wide-ranging research. It is quite *sui generis* and should find a welcome spot on the reference shelf of every person seriously concerned with historical theology and the history of theology in general and matters eschatological in particular.

McGinn's volume is the first of a projected four-volume history of Western Christian mysticism which will appear under the general title *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism.* McGinn, who has published major works in this area and who serves as general editor of the Paulist "Classics of Western Spirituality" and as a senior editor of the *Crossroad Encyclopedia of World Spirituality,* is supremely prepared for his task—one which he himself admits is a daunting one. In order to bring some limits within which to work, his study will focus only on mysticism in the West.

This first volume discusses the Jewish, Greek, and New Testament roots of Christian mysticism. Let me note, at the offset, that these pages bring much clarity to what is often a murky subject. Mysticism, as it is used in the vernacular today, is a modern term (McGinn traces it to the seventeenth century) of protean ambiguity. For his purposes, mysticism means the sensed presence of the divine in life. He puts his weight on the word *presence* and not on experience. Borrowing from von Hügel and others, he insists that mysticism is an integral part of Christianity since the gospel tells us that God in Christ is to be encountered as person rather than an object of thought. Furthermore, this presence of God in Christianity is to be experienced in a community through an encounter with word and sacrament. Hence, mysticism, at least in Christianity, has an ecclesial, liturgical, and sacramental dimension.

Furthermore, McGinn rejects, and rightly, the notion that only first-person autobiographical accounts can be analyzed in a study of mysticism. There is first of all a matrix and then a lived experience within that matrix. By taking note of that fact, McGinn can bypass sterile arguments as to whether, say, a Pseudo-Dionysius or a Meister Eckhart was truly a mystic at all. Positively, it permits him to read texts closely as a source for the matrix from

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which mysticism derives. Indeed, his close reading of texts is one of the conspicuous merits of this volume, allowing him to weigh, for example, the influence of a pagan like Plotinus on the development of Christian mysticism and how much Christian writers were able to modify pagan sources.

**The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century,** *by Bernard McGinn, Crossroad, $39.50, 494 pp.*

This volume ends with Augustine. The next will argue that the greatest flowering of mysticism in twelfth-century monasticism (mainly, but not exclusively, in the Cistercian family) has its roots in the story told in volume 1. That story, as this volume argues, is a slowly developing theological worldview entwining the wisdom of the Greeks (especially the Neo-Platonists), and the witness of the Scriptures to Christ. The worldview is first articulated as a whole by the titanic figure of Origen and modified by later generations who accepted, modified, rejected, and enlarged his insights. By the end of the fourth century Christian mysticism's main vehicle of expression was that of monasticism; a vehicle which would be the main one well into the Middle Ages.

McGinn's volume has an appendix of nearly a hundred pages surveying this century's research, psychological, philosophical, and theological, on mysticism. The appendix can be read separately from the main text (I read the appendix as if it were a discrete monograph) but, in the end, fleshes out the methodological claims made at the beginning of the volume.

Of the many books I have read this past year for this column, McGinn's is, by far, the most ambitious and the most promising. He has launched a major scholarly project which, when completed, will be cited as the standard and authoritative work on this complex and challenging subject. □


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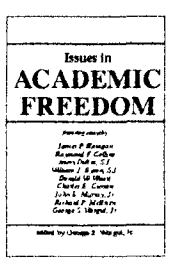


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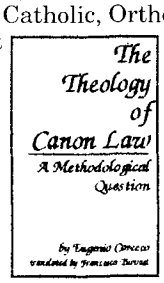


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# CORRESPONDENCE

*(Continued from page 2)*

## Distrust from the start

Washington, D.C.

*To the Editors:* *Commonweal*'s editorial comment on "The Teaching Ministry of the Diocesan Bishop: A Pastoral Reflection" ["Behold, a Mouse!" January 31] faulted the document. What I found disconcerting about the comment, apart from its general tone, is the fact that *Commonweal*'s critique had much more to say about alleged omissions than it did about the document's positive content.

Contrary to the charge that the document contains "a historical and intellectual hole," I suggest that it does indeed address issues posed by the Enlightenment and modernity. The very problematic the document addresses and the manner in which it presents the teaching office of the bishops engage questions raised by the intellectual and cultural currents of those movements. Perhaps the editors wish that this had been done differently or more explicitly. But I hope the criticism was not meant to imply that the agenda for a bishops' reflection on their teaching office ought to be determined by the agenda of the Enlightenment or modernity.

The care which the document urges the bishops to take in the exercise of their teaching authority would go a long way to prevent whatever past abuses of that authority the editors conjure up when they allude to "fears of their fellow citizens." In this connection the reflection itself refers repeatedly to the NCCB's 1989 document "Doctrinal Responsibilities: Approaches to Promoting Cooperation and Resolving Misunderstandings between Bishops and Theologians."

The document's comments on the consultation process which accompanied the bishops' pastoral letters on the peace and the economy are in no way intended to diminish the value of the process. Nevertheless the authority of the teaching of the bishops is not derived from such a process—as *Commonweal* itself admits. This point the document makes rather forthrightly. The final version of the doc-



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ument is the result of a consultation of both the bishops and a large number of theologians whose views represent the broad spectrum of positions within the Catholic mainstream. *Commonweal*'s attempt to read more into the reflection's statement about consultation is itself an example of the hermeneutics of suspicion at work; it illustrates the negative consequences for the Catholic community of an *a priori* attitude of distrust.

The bishops' document speaks for itself on the issue of theological research, writings or opinions, and the media. It serves as a reminder to theologians that part of their professional responsibility entails the avoidance of fomenting dissent or of calling into question the role of the magisterium. Further, when theologians' speculative ideas or opinions are reported in the media, they have an obligation to do all that they can to ensure that these are accurately represented. To ignore the fact that problems have occurred in each of these areas, and with some frequency, would have made the bishops' pastoral reflection guilty of even more omissions than *Commonweal* charges.

The editorial suggests some questions for all *Commonweal*'s readers. What is the authority of the statement on political responsibility in 1992, which the editorial so heartily approved? Is it derived from the fact that the editors agree with its content? Or is it derived from moral and political principles taught with authority by the bishops? "The Teaching Ministry of the Diocesan Bishop: A Pastoral Reflection" will help your readers to answer such questions, while it urges the values both of authoritative teaching and of personal acceptance by the faithful. I would encourage your readers to discover for themselves what the bishops had to say about these and many other issues.

(REV.) MICHAEL J. WALSH

*The writer is executive director of the Secretariat for Doctrine and Pastoral Practices of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.*

## Quindlen as arbiter

Princeton, N.J.

*To the Editors:* I used to read Ann Quindlen when she was a lifestyle columnist in the *Times*. Now that she's been promoted to the op-ed page, I no longer can ["Anna Quindlen," February 14].

The reason will be obvious to anyone who gave Quindlen's first few months of op-ed attempts a try. As a lifestyle columnist, she had a certain gift for light entertainment. As a public affairs columnist, her opinions are no better than those of one's next-door neighbor. Quindlen just doesn't *know* very much about anything that matters. (In this, she's the very opposite of Flora Lewis, whose absence from the op-ed page one doubly laments.)

There's something peculiarly American in this business of setting up as arbiters of public opinion people whose talents lie utterly elsewhere—the same logic that a few years ago had Marlon Brando solemnly

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issuing pronouncements on Native American affairs and Jane Fonda on foreign policy and today gives us innumerable television personalities and rock stars eager to instruct us on environmental issues and national elections. Just to balance the Quindlen piece, *Commonweal* owes it to its readers to feature an interview with New Kids on the Block on, say, the Aristotelian theory of virtue.

WILLIAM C. DOWLING

## Fine interview

New York, N.Y.

*To the Editors:* What a lovely greeting you sent to your subscriber-friends on Valentine's Day 1992! It was appropriately decorated with "hot pink" designs plus a very good picture of Anna Q., herself. At last, she's a cover girl!

The interview was delightful, insightful, well-edited. Father Santora is well on his way to becoming the best in journalists.

MARY P. BYRNES, S.C.

## Tips for a pundit

Birmingham, Ala.

*To the Editors:* Just what constitutes a "good Catholic" in Anna Quindlen's "church of the people" vs. "church of the hierarchy" ecclesiology is unclear. But I envy the theological self-assurance of Quindlen, or anyone else, who can flatly pronounce: "I know that I am a good Catholic."

Permit me, however, some suggestions to the gifted columnist so that she can represent not just "many, many Catholics" but many, many, many, many Catholics. The suggestions will err on the side of bluntness:

*"...But enough about me—let's talk about* religion*!"*

*First*, go heavier on the historical perspective.

The key reason for your willingness to write about the church, you said, is that "the church has made it its business over the past fifteen years to enter aggressively into public dialogue on some of the most important issues affecting this country."

Surely, church promotion of, say, workers' rights or racial equality was loud and clear before 1977. In the 1950s, in fact, the bishops (your "church of the hierarchy") backed civil rights so vocally that the general public overestimated integrationist sentiment among a morally lagging Catholic laity (your "church of the people"). Today the bishops take some stands that embarrass you (and me). This, however, is no reason to suggest that dogma-blind theocrats now roam the land in unprecedented force.

*Second*, do complain, but, please, also explain.

You accused the church of ignoring "evidence" of abortion's nonhomicidal character but failed to identify that evidence. In your *Times* column of January 29, you acknowledged the "horror" of late-term abortions. This made me feel hopeful you were about to explore fetal development and personhood seriously. No such luck.

God knows you have the ability and the soapbox. Go ahead; teach church leaders, that "group of unmarried men," how to discuss this difficult question in a clear, open, and *nonconsequentialist* manner.

*Third*, no matter how tempted, withhold blanket objection to church exercise of institutional muscle.

Granted, nothing so reassures many non-Catholics and ex-Catholics as hearing a daughter or son of the church lament its supposed antiquarian authoritarianism. Such criticism by the professed Catholic puts everyone at ease. It lets them know that, while you sport authentic ethnic roots, you harbor none of those ungainly moralistic thorns.

Careful, though. You might "despair" when a "bishop denies the sacraments to an elected official because of his stand on a public matter"—when, as currently, the matter is abortion.

But how did German bishops blunder when they forbade Catholic membership in the Nazi party? Or did the tragedy occur with the 1933 rescinding of the ban?

How about years ago when the church excommunicated recalcitrant segregationists in the Deep South? What of the Louisiana bishops' denunciations of David Duke's cause last November (or in the four previous Duke races)?

*Fourth*, consider the uses of empirical data.

Anecdote and personal experience are a columnist's stock-in-trade. Still, peek at some studies on Catholic education and you will avoid offensive lapses into condescension.

To be concrete about it, you said: "I was clearly not educated as a classic Catholic school kid." You distinguished yourself from such sad wretches since (a) you grew up with "some sense [that] you were able to tell if something was a sin if you personally thought it was wrong or not," and (b) you enjoyed religious teachers who were "well-educated and intellectually rigorous."

In my reading, the recent social science literature says that Catholic education has, *most typically*, left its students with both a keen, independent, high-on-the-Kohlberg-scale moral sense and solid prospects for future academic and professional achievement.

My fairly mainstream parochial education renders my acumen and independence suspect, of course. So review the surveys yourself. I'll dig up the citations for you. Or you might check with the local education office of the church of the hierarchy.

KEVIN M. DOYLE

## What drives ME crazy

Lansing, Mich.

*To the Editors:* For Anna Quindlen, "one of the things that the church does that makes [her] crazy" is the spending of money on what she sees as nonessentials "when people are starving in the streets in the United States." In this case, "the church" is defined as the bishops and the nonessential is their prolife campaign.

Without debating that particular spending decision, I agree that the U.S. bishops are economic actors and their spending decisions impact society at large and hungry people in particular. Likewise, Anna Quindlen is an economic actor and her spending also impacts hungry people.



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Because I know so many people mangled by poverty in our society, one of the things that wealthy Catholics do that makes *me* crazy is their spending money on multiple homes and huge tuitions for their children's schooling (St. Luke's tuition rates begin at $8,490 a year) "when people are starving in the streets in the United States."

Ms. Quindlen says, "I know that I am a good Catholic." I am not able to make that same claim about myself, so it may be said that I have no standing to criticize. But in this interview I read a woman who is self-righteous (I am a good Catholic), self-important (I would only choose to live at the center of the universe), and self-indulgent (none of the schools around her are good enough for us). For me, another heroine, though a minor one, bites the dust.

CHRISTINE A.W. DOBY

## Double standard

Washington, D.C.

*To the Editors:* Trying to find consistency in Anna Quindlen's varied pronouncements about the Catholic church is like trying to piece together a single puzzle only to find out that pieces from several puzzles have been jumbled together in the same box. This is particularly true when the subject is abortion.

Quindlen lavishes praise on the church for standing with those who are poor and otherwise disenfranchised, but simultaneously insists that the vulnerable unborn are not worthy of concern. She praises the New York Archdiocese, calling it the best institution "in this city and, in my opinion, in this country" for aiding the homeless, the hungry, pregnant women and their babies. But where abortion is concerned she will not grant even a presumption of good will to New York's archbishop or the church. No reasons are given, unless you can make sense out of Quindlen's statements that the unborn could be "neither nonlife nor life," "burgeoning life," and "potential life"—all at the same time—and that abortion, therefore, is really not a destruction of life.

I am further confused as to why Quindlen believes it is important for her to communicate with the public on issues she cares about "passionately," but that the church should not seek expert advice on how best to communicate about abortion, an issue the church cares about passionately. This interview reminds me of a Quindlen column in which she ridiculed release of a prolife film by celebrity sports figures—right after the prochoice movement (in which she includes herself) had organized Hollywood celebrities to visit Capitol Hill demanding abortion rights!

One final note. Quindlen, and the abortion advocacy movement in general, would do well to avoid slipping into the reverse sexism Quindlen demonstrates in *Commonweal*. It would be more reasonable, and certainly more coherent, to attempt to challenge the medical reality supporting the church's prolife stance—that a new human life begins at conception—than to dispute something because men say it.

I am disappointed that an intellectual journal such as *Commonweal* would publish Quindlen's ramblings. Gross generalizations and unfounded claims regarding the church's advocacy for the unborn may sell in the secular media market, but they are fish out of water in *Commonweal*.

HELEN M. ALVARE

*The writer is director of information and planning, Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities, National Conference of Catholic Bishops.*

## Small-t triumphalism

New Rochelle, N.Y.

*To the Editors:* Concerning "Lenny Bruce Lives" [Et cetera, January 31], we would like to offer an opinion on capitalization and religious nomenclature.

While *Playboy*'s style manual would capitalize *church* in references to the Catholic Church, in deference to a tradition going back to Lenny Bruce, we note that you avoid capitalizing *triumphalism* in your reference to "Roman Catholic triumphalism."

We feel this is an important nuance, and should be applauded. A capital-T Triumphalism would smack of preconciliar sectarianism and constitute a barrier to ecumenical efforts. Still, by retaining the term, albeit with a lower-case "t," we cling to the truth "that it is through Christ's Catholic Church alone that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained" (Decree on Ecumenism, #3).

Perhaps we might call this moderate triumphalism, or, even, mediate triumphalism. Veteran Thomists among your readers might approve this kind of *distinguo*, while modish Lonerganians would find it compatible with their "differentiated consciousness." We could live with it at CUF.

JAMES A. SULLIVAN

*The writer is vice-president of Catholics United for the Faith.*


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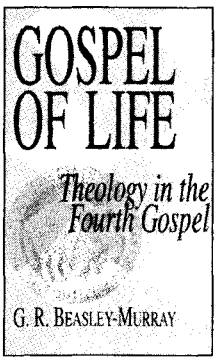


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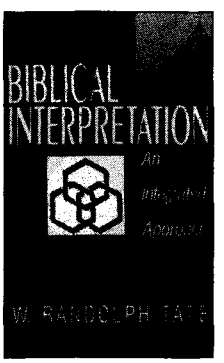


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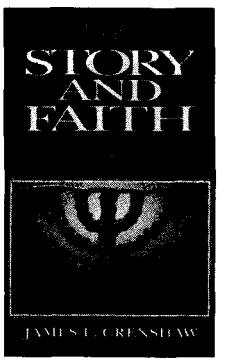


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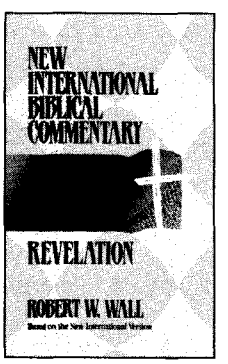


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